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Foundations of Inequity: A Social Ecological Exploration of Colorado Rural School Leaders Lived Experiences

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Abstract

The aim of this mixed methods research study was to explore the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders with the objective of explicating factors embedded within their lived experiences towards, where appropriate, an evolution of principal preparation programs; to lay the foundation for later research study inquiries; to determine if the phenomenon being observed may be expounded upon by a current theory; and to conclude if lived experiences contain answers towards a resolution of the two problems which informed this study. This exploratory approach yielded two primary themes with supporting points that are presented and discussed within this and the following chapter. These emergent themes include: (a) the scope and profundity of the rural school leader role, and (b) rural school leader perceptions of role preparedness.

This study's discoveries revealed numerous access points to support both the significance of and attention to Colorado's rural school leaders lived experiences. However, it is acknowledged that the discoveries, which emerged as part of this exploratory study, may also exist in non-rural contexts. Further, while this study was guided by an attention on rural school leaders, some of the emergent discoveries may also extend to teachers and staff both in rural and non-rural contexts. The problems guiding this research study were: (a) the decline in the availability of education funding; and (b) the decline in availability of rural-prepared leaders for Colorado's rural schools. Thus, the research question that guided this exploration was how can the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders inform the evolution of principal preparation programs?

Organized and presented as supporting points under the first theme described as the scope and profundity of some of the rural school leader roles, includes the description of rural school leader's role responsibilities, illustration of factors that contribute to perceptions of role complexity, illustration of factors that contribute to perceptions of role fulfillment difficulty, resource availability and leader choices affecting role delegation, illustration of factors that contribute to role frustration, role burnout, and role departure, and rural as an intentional choice. Under the second theme, described as perceptions of role preparedness, supporting points includes the presentation of retirement timelines and perceptions of current role successor availability, role preparedness within the parameters of rural experiences and rural-specific role preparation, role socialization, and professional development.

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FOUNDATIONS OF INEQUITY: A SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF
COLORADO RURAL SCHOOL LEADERS LIVED EXPERIENCES

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Bryan E. DeShasier

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The sustainable future of rural students, schools, and their communities is subject to the commitment of a school leader who has the knowledge, understanding, and experience to lead in rural contexts. The rural school leader role is fragile – almost always a balancing act between shaping and securing a sustainable future for the rural school community and the rural community while at the same time, working to secure his or her own sustainable future within those communities. Thus, it is important for the rural school leader to know about rural – not only from the geographical position, but also from the relationships that exist within those unique rural contexts. Some would argue it is vital for the rural school leader to *be* rural, giving way to, like it or not, good or bad, purposeful assimilation.

Rural is not a place that some think about – often or at all. As Sherwood (2000) states, "time and again, rural areas have been declared the orphaned 'stepchild' and when attention is paid to rural, it is more often for the sake of a representative sampling than for learning something more substantive about rural schools" (p. 159). In opposition and more recently, at a national level, rural appears to be growing in attention and importance. The Colorado rural story seems similar to what is occurring at a national level, but in reality empirical evidence has and continues to demonstrate inequities in education funding and rural school leader preparation dating back to as early as 1918.

These inequities, largely defended as constitutional by Colorado's Supreme Court, policymakers, and the State's education leaders, are rooted in the notion of local control and contribute to dramatic education funding deficiencies, which has had adverse implications towards rural school leader preparation and professional development and by extension, role performance. These adverse effects further contribute to a decline in role satisfaction, increase in opportunity for role burnout, and eventually, for some, result in role departure. Consolidation of Colorado rural schools, increasing rural community and rural school populations, declining enrollment in Colorado's school-leader licensure programs, and a growing disinterest in the rural school leader role by potential successors, is cause for concern.

Problem Statement

The problems guiding this research study was the continued decline in both the availability of education funding and the availability of well-prepared leaders for Colorado's rural schools. As such, the purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of existing Colorado rural school leaders with the objective of explicating factors embedded within their lived experiences towards understanding how the continued decline in both the availability of education funding and availability of well-prepared leaders for rural schools, presently effects the rural school leader role.

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) published a report (2005) that focused on rural school leader preparation. The crux of this report, in part, suggests "there is a need for school district leaders and their community partners to inform state and local policymakers about both the shortage of money and leaders for rural schools" (p. 7). The primary element causing damage to Colorado's education funding is the

"State Budget Stabilization Factor" (Colorado Department of Education Public School Finance Unit, 2014, p. 3) or affectionately termed the *negative factor*. According to CDE (2014), "the negative factor was put in place in 2010-2011 by the [Colorado] legislature as a way to reduce [education] funding to school districts to balance the state budget" (para. 2) and according to the Colorado Association of School Boards (2014), "the negative factor has forced all Colorado school districts to make cuts to important educational programs" (para. 7). The funding losses incurred by school districts over the last five years is reported at "three billion dollars" (para. 8).

Regarding the shortage of rural school leaders, the Colorado Department of Higher Education Legislative Educator Preparation Report (2015) points out; there has been a 52.45% decline in the number of enrollments in the administrator licensure programs since 2010. The lowest year being 2012 where only 20 enrollments were recorded; a 67.21% decline from 2010 where 61 enrollments were recorded. In line with this sharp decline in administrator licensure, enrollments in Colorado's principal preparation programs have experienced a decline, but not as severe. There has been an 11.56% decline from 2010 to 2014; where 2013 reflected the lowest decline on record for this period citing just slightly more than 760 enrollments, which is a 17.71% decline from just over 925 enrollments recorded in 2010.

Non-rural school leaders witnessing the struggles rural school leader's face on a day-to-day basis affects role interest. Past and current literature, as discussed in chapter three, continues to state the plight of the rural school leader as being overwhelmed with excessive role demands, reaching role burnout, and despite the continued research findings in and across our nation's rural areas, this problem persists. As noted by

researchers over a decade ago, "who wants to go into education and school leadership when our policy makers are bashing education?" (Hirsch & Groff, 2002, p. 1). Thus, these problems served as a guide towards the purpose of this research study.

Purpose Statement

The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders in an effort to lay the foundation for later inquiries and to determine if the phenomenon being observed may be expounded upon by a current theory. This approach yielded two emergent themes that are presented and discussed in a later chapter. These themes are and extend across sub-topics of role responsibilities and perceptions of role preparedness. This research is not an evaluation of Colorado's existing principal and/or superintendent/administrative preparation programs offered through a number of colleges and universities, nor is it a comparison of the rural school leader's lived experiences against Colorado's Principal Quality Standards (Colorado Department of Education, 2011). I acknowledge both elements as important factors in Colorado's school leader preparation. However, my decision to exclude the evaluation and comparison of these factors from this research is exclusively based on a predetermined research scope.

Last, readers of this research should not correlate or infer my exclusion of these aforementioned factors as an implication of negative opinion or a level of disregard towards the value proposition of these factors within school-leader role preparation. Moreover, this exclusion should also not devalue these factors within the readers' perceptions or position(s) regarding school leader development.

Research Question

The emergent question guiding this exploration is how can the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders inform the evolution of principal preparation programs?

Rationale and Significance

The findings from this study contributes to the existing research and body of literature on rural school-leader role responsibilities and role complexity. Further, it informs my recommendations towards an evolution of principal preparation programs that may – in all or in part, only attend to non-rural contexts. I draw upon, where present, research findings to inform the expansion of current, non-rural tailored school-leader preparation programs, to one that is more widely transferable to multiple geographic contexts. My hope is that as professional opportunities present themselves, existing and/or aspiring school-leader practitioners can successfully cross geographic contexts (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural) and leverage their formal program-developed knowledge and skills towards supporting those new communities.

Attention, research, and funding for the study of rural education matters is not often encouraged (Sherwood, 2000) as focus has been primarily directly towards urban contexts. Over time, the increasing federal, state, and local accountability pressures on twenty-first century rural school leaders are informed by changes to and the addition of new legislation. Moreover, with just over twelve million students (NCES, 2011-2012; The Rural School and Community Trust, 2012) attending rural schools across the nation, the empirical results and implications from this research study and others like it, may be far-reaching.

Overview of Methodology

This research was conducted using a convergent parallel mixed-method design; whereby qualitative and quantitative data strands were implemented concomitantly and where both strands were equally weighted (Creswell, 2008, 2007). Creswell (2008) stated, the primary supposition of a mixed methods research design "provides a better understanding of the research problem than either form of data alone" (p. 2). In doing so, the objective of this design is to engage a deeper socio-ecological awareness of the identified research topic. As suggested by Newton (2003) and Yin (2003), engaging this deeper awareness, "allows the researcher to develop a greater depth of tacit knowledge" (Newton, 2003, p. 9). The term t*acit knowledge*, according to Polanyi (1958), acquired through lived experiences cannot simply be transferred through conventional means.

Assumptions

The following general assumptions guided this research: (a) Participants will meet the criteria as set by the researcher; (b) all respondents will accurately interpret the self-completion questionnaire instruments, interview questions, and will answer honorably; (c) participants, willing to be interviewed, will be candid in their responses to interview questions; (d) a sufficient number of participants will be willing to participate in both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews; (e) "causal inferences" (Simon & Goes, 2013, p. 2) will not be made from the results of the study; and f) results of the study are not expected to be generalizable (Creswell, 2008, 2007; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009).

Definitions of Terminology

This section contains the definitions of terminology used throughout this study.

Acculturation "is the learning of appropriate behavior of one's host culture" (Grunland & Mayers, 2015, p. 38).

Assimilation is an extreme process, whereby a person loses their culture of origination (Piaget, 1950).

Enculturation is "the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to become functioning members of their societies" (Grunland & Mayers, 2015, p. 41).

Epistemology, denoted by Hirschheim, Klein, and Lyytinen (1995), is "the nature of human knowledge and understanding that can possibly be acquired through different types of inquiry and alternative methods of investigation" (p. 20).

Land Grant College. Resulting from the 1862 Morrill Land-Grant Act, a land-grant college is a college

> where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactic[s], to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the Legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. (CSU, 2012, para. 9)

Later, the president of the American Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities suggested the evolution of the land-grant college, by saying: "the future of land-grant colleges will be determined by the nature of the problems that come up in the areas they serve" (Atkinson, 1937, p. 49). Colorado State University (CSU, 2012) is the only land-grant college that remains a land-grant college in the state of Colorado.

Local Control. "Rather than establishing a centralized, state-administered system, Colorado's constitutional framers "… made the choice to place control 'as near the people as possible' by creating a representative government in miniature to govern instruction" (Colorado Association of School Boards, 2015, para. 1).

Non-Rural includes all urban and suburban contexts.

Ontology. Wand and Weber (1993) refer to ontology as "a branch of philosophy concerned with articulating the nature and structure of the world" (p. 220).

Othering is the "objectification of another person or group" or "creating the other, which puts aside and ignores the complexity and subjectivity of the individual" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003, p. 103; Dervin, 2010, p. 87).

Placism is "the discrimination against people based on where they live" (Jimerson, 2005, p. 211).

Poverty. Def. 1.1. (2015). In *Oxford English dictionary online*, as a noun, is a "deficiency in an appropriate or desired quality; the condition of being poorly supplied with something." Retrieved from www. oxforddictionaries.com.

Privilege. Def. 4.a. (2015). In *Oxford English dictionary online*, as a verb, is "to give somebody/something special rights or advantages that others do not have." Retrieved from www. oxforddictionaries.com.

Rural School Leader is any person who is currently serving or who has previously served in a leadership role within a Colorado rural school and where their role titles could include, but are not limited to: 1) principal; 2) director; 3) head of school; 4) superintendent and principal; or 5) superintendent, principal, and teacher.

Urbanized areas and clusters are "densely settled cores of census blocks with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas. When the core contains a population of 50,000 or more, it is designated as an urbanized area. Core areas with populations between 25,000 and 50,000 are classified as urban clusters" (NCES, 2006, p. 1).

Organization of the Dissertation

The organization of this dissertation does not entirely follow the traditional five-chapter arrangement that is widely accepted and in place across much of the academy. Beginning with chapter 2, which is traditionally the literature review chapter, I describe rural, in general, from a few geographic, social, and cultural positions to provide context ahead of the literature, findings, and implications chapters.

Next, I draw upon relevant literature to construct chapter 3. This chapter is intentionally organized with the results chapter in mind. I begin the chapter with an introduction, which leads into the presentation of literature across three separate thematic-informed sections, and I conclude with a presentation and discussion of a modified conceptual framework. Chapter 4 remains faithful to the traditional organization and is where I present and discuss my research method and procedures.

Chapter 5, however, is again a departure from tradition. Context-informing data emerged during the research. The addition of this data as a stand-alone chapter was to ensure the emergent context-informing data received was not lost within the findings and discussion chapters. In doing so, chapter five serves a contextual connection between the literature review and the results chapters. Chapters 6 and 7 follow the more traditional approach whereby I present, discuss, and analyze the results against the literature and through the selected conceptual framework, I then present implications across a number

of areas like state and federal policy, future research and higher education to name just a few.

Data collected from the study participants revealed both asset and tension-based lived experiences. In some instances, only tension-based information is available. However, in those instances where both asset and tension-based information is available, I include both for comparison. This study's design along with the small participant population ensures the findings are not generalized to the overall populace of Colorado's rural school leaders nor its rural contexts. Further, the design and population also binds the findings within the parameters of the study by removing the opportunity to imply these findings are only isolated to rural school leaders who live and/or work in rural Colorado.

Awareness

I use the term *awareness* and navigate away from using the term *understanding*. Using the term *understanding* assumes a level of metacognition (Heick, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2012) that, as part of this research study, I do not measure. Further, I do not want to prescribe my understanding of rural, based on my lived experiences, onto anyone as their lived experiences, through which they perceive and understand rural, may be dissimilar. Moreover, the rural lived experiences that I privilege are deeply rooted within my social and cultural narratives and I am careful not to assert the power and privilege that I assign to *my* rural over the rural of another. Therefore, I organize this chapter and this study to give the reader space to generate an awareness of rural by situating themselves, their tacit knowledge, and their lived experiences within a more expansive description of rural, as opposed to one that I will later demonstrate as restrictive.

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Acceptance

      To accomplish awareness, in Chapter 2 I explore and discuss the term *rural* through: (a) government-sanctioned definitions; (b) images and perceptions of rural, which informs the groundwork for this research; (c) socially and culturally constructed historical views; and a (d) discussion of community strength and influence. I conclude this chapter by discussing my individual understanding of the term rural, which includes a discussion of my biases grounded in living more than twenty years in a mid-western rural community. Here, the reader may also take the time to reflect on their awareness of rural and to situate their reflections within their own social, cultural, and ecological constructs.

      To close this research study, I added a personal implications section where I discuss some of the actions I can, and have already taken. I also add a brief section where I reflect on this journey and how my positionality has changed. Therefore, to begin, I will not start with *Once upon a time*, but I will start with…

Once upon a *rural* place.

CHAPTER 2. RURAL DESCRIBED

It is no small undertaking to contextualize and operationalize the term *rural* across multiple dimensions and do so in a manner that not only supports the construct of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, but also to frame rural-focused research. Others have attempted to define and/or describe rural, often as a homogenous place while others stand faithfully by their position that rural is unequivocally heterogeneous. As extant literature shows, in reality, rural is not homogenous and to engage in rural research, accepting this notion is crucial. This chapter's construct provides the reader with a rich description of the term *rural* through geographical, social, cultural, and economic contexts. There is a palpable tension between the geographical definitions of rural and the social, cultural, and economic descriptions that are explored throughout this chapter.

Whitaker (1983) argued that, "if *'rural'* is to become a useful analytical tool and guide for educators, it is necessary to operationalize the concept; to separate out its component parts and to specify those attributes which distinguish rural from urban, metropolitan, and non-rural" (p. 71). These parts, as Whitaker remarks, implies a need to disrupt the hegemonic discourse that all rural is similar and in response, should not be treated as such. Equally, to provide a rich depiction of rural, this and subsequent chapters are designed to illustrate both the similarities and differences among Colorado's rural.

I explore historical narratives and relevant literature to provide a means which to describe and discuss the term *rural* from a position that does not adhere to a single paradigm. To begin, I start with the original 1874 definition.

Geographic Definition of Rural

In 1874, the term rural was first adopted by the United States Census Bureau to define a community outside of a city or town with a population of 8,000 or below (Whittaker, 1982). In 1910, the population threshold was reconsidered and reduced to 2,500 from 8,000 (Ricketts, Johnson-Webb, & Taylor, 1998). According to Chapter 12 of the Census Bureau's Geographic Areas Reference Manual (1994), the most current definition of the term *rural* is as follows:

> Territory, population, and housing units that the Census Bureau does not classify as urban are classified as rural. A rural place is any incorporated place or Census Designated Place (CDP) with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants that are located outside of an urbanized area (UA). A place is either entirely urban or entirely rural, except for those designated as an extended city. (United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). Geographic Areas Reference Manual, 1994, p. 12-1)

To further delineate the differences of how rural is defined by population size and level of isolation from urban and metropolitan areas, the Office of Management and Budget (2000) added to the definition of rural by further categorizing it as "rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote" (p. 249). The federal government's definitions and implied construct of the term *rural* remain highly general and guided solely by the number of its inhabitants within a specified distance to an urbanized area or urban cluster. I contend the federal government's definitions and implied homogenous constructs form and perpetuate a systemic failure of rural as being meaningful due to an absence of change in their definition for over a century and due to an absence of definitional

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evolution to include ecological, social, and relevant cultural considerations and implications, just to name a few.

Moreover, this seemingly archaic use of the term *rural* by the federal government, as well as any rural education researcher, asserts Hoggart (1990), is "detrimental to the advancement of social theory" (p. 245). Whereby, the advancement of social theory is to "fulfill the promise of the social sciences and to provide theory that is unarguably effective in practical application" (Foundation for the Advancement of Social Theory, 2015, para. 1). However, the effectiveness of a homogenous rural is subject to argument as published literature asserts a heterogeneous rural, both in theory and in practical application.

While the federal government relies on their geographical definitions as a common boundary for most of their rural programs, it is important to acknowledge and illustrate the term *rural* and its contexts as being more contested and expansive compared to that of a single paradigm and/or discourse linked simply to a geographical location. This notion of a contested and expansive view "allows space for interpretation to be applied" (Short, 2006, p. 144) to the term *rural* and its contexts further inviting privilege to the lived experiences through which the interpretation of rural is both meaningful and intentional.

However, in order to illustrate how my research is shaped by the term and contexts of rural, it is necessary that I expand this discussion through an investigation of the extant literature to provide contextualized and operationalized views of rural by means of considering its ecological, social, cultural, and community influences. Prior

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researchers have discussed each of these factors, in part, as underpinnings towards a more recognized and accepted description of a heterogeneous rural.

Rural Images and Perceptions

As existing literature suggests, rural America is portrayed through both idyllic and adverse imagery and these "images are important…as they reveal much about the diverse ways in which different individuals, organizations and groups of people understand and behave in the rural space" (Yarwood, 2005, p. 19). Simply put by Whitaker (1983), "rural America is many realities" [and] "not all rural is like our rural" (p. 71). However, people interpret these rural images in a manner that often rests on their rural and non-rural exposure and lived experiences (Plantinga, 2009).

Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, and Smith (2011), discuss how rural is often described using both

> idyllic and negative images as evidenced in the popular [television shows] Little House on the Prairie or The Andy Griffith Show; viewed as idyllic, and Deliverance or the Texas Chainsaw Massacre viewed as negative - wherein rural people are portrayed as dangerous, wild, [and] backward. (p. 23)

Americans, both individually and collectively, may struggle with these opposing views of what rural means. Some of the ideologies behind these opposing views that are "widely held by Americans" (p. 23) and perpetuated through media representation (e.g., news, television shows, and Hollywood-based movies, etc.) are:

> Simultaneously understood as a source of moral guidance, when we think about the high regard we hold for family farms and their moral purity, and [rural] is [also] considered to be a symbol of backwardness, idiocy, and moral repugnance when we think about familiar stereotypes such as redneck, hick, and bumpkin. (Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, and Smith, 2011, p. 23)

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These opposing views suggests a confluence between the pleasant and adverse images among the collective American population's perceptions of rural; making it problematic for American's to discern what may be factual versus what may be fictional depictions. However, despite the adverse images of rural, Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, and Smith (2011) contend, "rural areas and their geographical and social distance from urbanism interrelate to create rural simulacra: images of the rural that exist as idealized figments of the imagination but are nonetheless based on perceptions of an idealized reality" (p. 66) which are often romanticized.

These created idyllic "figments of the imagination based on an idealized reality" (p. 66) account for some of the reasons why people choose to live in rural spaces and places (Halfacree, 1994). Further, they also provide explanation for why "the nation continues to point to rural places as a source of such values as economic independence, just rewards for hard work, community cohesion, strong families, close ties to the lands, and others" (Davis & Marema, 2008, p. 1). Regardless of the "reality of rural America, the idea of rural America will always be popular with major segments of our population because, it is America's field of dreams" (Danbom, 1996, p. 18). However, as I will demonstrate later in this and later chapters, the notion of a romanticized rural is not always the hegemonic discourse that informs the perceptions of rural. It is in fact, the opposite.

Rural Sociology: A History of a Socially Constructed Environment

Understanding how rural is socially viewed requires a look into its history. Embedded within the term *rural* is a rich past through which the evolution of its social

framework, as evidenced through historical narratives, images, and artifacts revealing positive attention by early government, is found. While rural images and perceptions abound, how people interpret, classify, and re-distribute their perceptions of those images to others, has significant historical underpinnings dating back to the early 1900's. History reveals how those who were interested in researching and understanding rural geography were relegated as outcasts. These attitudes are in part, how urban contexts gained ground in importance and as I demonstrate, may be why some colleges and universities fail to consider rural as an element within their research agendas.

Cloke (2006) discusses rural geography as a constructed evolution, beginning with a functional concept in the 1970's which "sought to fix the rural spaces through the identification of its distinctive functional characteristics" (p. 850). Here, this assumed rural is somehow broken and in need of repair. In the 1980's, rural evolved to a more political-economic concept "that attempted to position rural as a product of broader social, economic and political processes" (p. 850). The 1990's, ushered in rural as being socially constructed, "such that the importance of 'rural' lies in the fascinating world of social, cultural, and moral values that have become associated with rurality, rural spaces, and rural life" (p. 851). This notion of rural geography as being socially constructed refers to the "immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and dynamic cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact" (Barnett & Casper, 2001, p. 465). The rural geography chosen for this study is Colorado.

According to Halfacree (1993), the construct of rural sociology has varied socioecological underpinnings. These underpinnings conclude to an ideology that

suggests an "assumed correlation between social and spatial attributes has been a strong force in the organization and development of rural studies" (p. 25). Further, these underpinnings "assumes that population density affects [both] behavior and attitude" (Halfacree, 1993, p. 25). This population density notion has origins pointing to both historical rural and non-rural social change research, conducted by Louis Wirth in 1938. Twenty years before Louis Wirth, some of the rural social ideologies were under consideration by Dr. Charles Josiah Galpin (1918). Galpin today, is recognized as the "father of rural sociology in the United States" (Gilbert, 1982, p. 611). "Rural sociology research focuses on environmental well-being, sustainable development of natural resources, social and community quality of life, and diffusion and impacts of technologies" (Ohio State University School of Environment and Natural Resources, 2014, p. 1).

Galpin, in 1918, as cited by Gilbert (1982) believed, "neither culture nor ecology – not even agriculture, could undergird rural social theory" (p. 611). Moreover, Gilbert (1982) purports Gilpin problematized rural by citing rural people had "restricted contact with people and ideas" (p. 611). However, not unlike Gilpin, Davis and Marema (2008) also contend the geographic position of rural, may somewhat adversely influence those who are non-rural inhabitants; viewing those who inhabit rural spaces as "excluded from mainstream life" (p. 3). This notion of geographic position and its resulting implications for human isolation, further exacerbates the generalization by non-rural American's that rural inhabitants, despite the perception of rural being an idyllic place, "are intellectually deprived, outside the circulation of current thought, and distanced from culture,

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economics, and opportunity" (Davis & Marema, 2008, p. 3). These perceptions, while

troubling, do have some merit. I will demonstrate in a later chapter, how geographic

isolation is a factor to be considered when developing preparation programs for rural

school leaders.

This view of "rural as a problem" (Gilbert, 1982, p. 611) was not always the

position of those who were involved with rural research at that time in our American

history. In 1917, Paul L. Vogt, in the preface of his book, *Introduction to Rural*

Sociology, wrote:

> It is hoped that this text may lead to a much wider research into rural problems in
> all parts of the country and that the full understanding of the conditions and forces
> of rural life necessary to bring about and maintain the fullest, richest rural
> civilization may result. (p. viii)

A short time later, K.L. Butterfield, while at the Third Annual American Country Life

Association, Inc. (ACLA) conference, touted the plight and importance of the farmer

within the framework of a "permanent rural community" (American Country Life

Association, 1920, p. 6). However, history reveals a departure from this positive attitude

towards rural, to one that reflects rural as generally less important and radically

unfavorable.

Non-rural sociologists marginalized those who participated in rural sociology

research. It became evident in 1967, but not reported until fourteen years later by a

former American Sociological Association (ASA) president. Loomis (1981), reported

material attitudinal differences between rural and non-rural sociologists citing:

In an unpublished report I prepared from questionnaires voluntarily filled out by members at regional meetings of the ASA the year I was president in 1967, reveals 35 percent of those responding believed the field of sociology would be better off without the Rural Sociological Society and that it should be abolished… and that sizeable portions of American non-rural sociologists would not accept a rural sociologist in such status-roles as 1) office mate; 2) co-author of a book or monograph; and 3) chairman or head of your department or unit. (p. 59)

Loomis' absence of action may have much to do with his fear of his own marginalization resulting in his deliberate concealment of this information for over a decade. This negative view of rural sociology, which seems to have persisted into the twenty-first century, has led the field to a precarious position, as Smith (2011) reports:

Rural sociology has fallen into a chronic state of crisis, distraught, in turns, by the discipline's theoretical paucity, its institutional isolation, its estrangement from the more general discipline of sociology, and, at the base, its seeming irrelevance to modern urban society. (p. 1)

This current state, traced back to a point in history where the rural and urban comparison was first suggested, was ushered in by K.L. Butterfield (1908) where he stated:

Perhaps the most common error in studying rural conditions is the failure to distinguish the vital difference between the urban problem and the rural problem. Sociologically, the city problem is that of congestion; the rural problem is that of isolation. (p. 9)

In connection with Butterfield's early declaration (1908), Smith (2011) goes on to suggest:

This supposition [by Butterfield] placed rural sociology at odds with one of the fundamental premises of early sociology; the evolutionary ontology that posited rural social life as prior to urban civilization, that considered rural life more natural than social, and that therefore saw the city, not the country as sociology's object of study. (p. 14)

Butterfield's 1908 statement, contrary to his 1920 position, gave way for sociologists to begin to redirect their thinking towards urban as being more important than rural and thus began to leave the importance of rural in the past. Smith (2011) concluded by saying: "urban was the category that demanded understanding in the present; remaining rural areas were naturally developed and therefore unproblematic (p. 17)" and the reason for the sociologist's shift away from rural was rooted in a belief that "they [rural areas] would eventually mature into urban civilizations" (Smith, 2011, p. 17).

Historical sociologists were less than accurate with their predictions of rural as it has been more than a century and the whole of rural has not matured into one giant urban civilization; evidenced by the growing number students who are classified as rural. Regardless of the non-rural sociologists being incorrect about the disappearance of rural into an urban context, it could be posited that historical criticisms by non-rural sociologists may have had long-lasting, adverse effects on the evolution of perceptions and attitudes of rural research. If these criticisms were encouraged as new researchers entered the academy, the value and by extension, the importance of rural research may have eroded from the hegemonic historical narratives of researchers intentionally making the decision to be and to remain disconnected from all links to rural research. This interpretation gives way to Howley's (2001) assertion about a university's attention to rural and their research priorities, suggesting:

> Many institutions with reputations less bright than those of elite schools, would gladly sell out their host communities in rural areas in order to lay their hands on a fraction of the soft money that flows so easily downhill to places like Stanford and Harvard. Higher Education institutions have global reputations to build or maintain, and they don't really want to be seen with their hick neighbors, much less be working with them. (p. 11)

While this statement may be applicable to some colleges and universities, there

has been a noticeable increase in attention towards rural in the U.S. as evidenced by the

creation of a number of federal programs and the steady funding for rural education

initiatives; both subjects that I discuss in the following chapter.

Rural Culture and Community

There is a widely-accepted position among educational researchers regarding

some of the differences between rural and urban cultures. Researchers Evans, Forney,

Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) articulate one position as:

> Persons from urban and middle-class cultures demonstrate higher-stage thinking
> while those from rural and working-class cultures do not score above the
> conventional level. Likely reflecting educational achievement, these differences
> reflect the multitude of values and socialization processes of these diverse
> cultures. (p. 109)

While this position lends itself to a discussion of rural values and cultures,

researchers contend this position to be firmly rooted in family, society, and group

socialization (Evans, et al., 2010; Flora & Flora, 2008). Moreover, there appears to be an

assumption by Evans et al. (2010) whereby those who inhabit rural areas may not be

economically elevated to a middle class status. Here, this assumes all rural contexts to be

economically homogenous and does not allow space to extend this notion beyond those

socially constructed boundaries towards the awareness of a heterogeneous rural. As I will

present in a later chapter, the economic elevation of some rural communities to a status of

above middle class, does exist.

Theobald and Wood (2010), as part of their research, asked a simple but pointed

question: "how do people learn to *be* rural" (p. 17)? The answer to this question may lie

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within historical group narratives, passed down from generation-to-generation. These narratives may unobtrusively encourage the acceptance and resulting persistence of dominant cultural positions and contexts of rural, embedded within and shared by the power frameworks of families, communities, and group constructs (Flora & Flora, 2008). However, what is missing from this ideology is an explanation of how those who enter from outside the rural community, if they so choose, become rural. Extant literature is discussed in the following chapter towards the explication of factors through which rural, as an epistemological ideology, is described.

Culture. While there are a number of variations on the term *culture*, this particular definition considers both external and internal ideologies and extends its reach by providing an operationalized approach through which multiple dimensions of rural culture may be situated. Schein (2010), one of the leading researchers on culture, formally defines culture as a:

> Pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 18)

Schein, through his definition of culture, provides informal instruction on how non-rural individuals may become rural and they may do so through acculturation, enculturation, or assimilation. However, learning to be rural is not a one-sided approach. Literature, discussed in the following chapter, reveals a barrier to cultural entry that may never be overcome and is often accompanied with the stigma of being labeled an outsider. Moreover, this could also be a reason why some rural school leaders find

themselves under near constant scrutiny by their rural communities and their rural school communities.

James Baldwin, an American novelist and a literary voice in the era of civil rights activism in the 1950's and 1960's, wrote "the American ideal is, after all, that everyone should be as much alike as possible" (Baldwin, 1984, p. 65). When considering both the definition and contextual organization of rural, we as a nation are often inspired to think of rural as a single paradigm or discourse and not one with multiple dimensions influenced by "economic structures, race, ethnicity, and cultures" (Davis & Marema, 2008, p. 1). This paradigm is rooted in our mostly romanticized perceptions of rural and as Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, and Smith (2011) cited, is fundamentally inaccurate.

The debate of whether or not rural consists of a single economic, racial, ethnic or cultural paradigm, is negated by the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (2010-2011). This report reveals that of the 12 million rural public elementary and secondary students enrolled in the fall of 2010, 70.8% or close to 9 million identify as White; 12.8% or 1.5 million identify as Hispanic; 10% or 1.2 million identify as Black, 4.2% or 502,761 identify as Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native or identify as having two or more races, and 2.2% or 260 thousand identify as Asian. However, regardless of the diverse population, the "American ideal" (Baldwin, 1984, p. 65) of homogeneity, as a hegemonic discourse, remains dominant in both rural and non-rural cultures. Research has concluded that rural inhabitants are "recipients of the messages from the dominant culture regarding what it means to be rural" (Theobald & Wood, 2010, p. 18). According to researchers Flora and Flora (2008), this dominant

cultural understanding of what it means to be rural is passed down through an "understanding of society and [the rural inhabitant's] role in it; including speech, dress, and ways of being" (p. 55); aligning to Schein's (2010) definition of culture. In rural places and spaces, the dominant culture is defined and held firm by the socioecological constructs of that particular rural community through the basis and influence of both social and cultural capital, which "determines what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge is to be achieved, and how knowledge is validated" (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 55). Flora and Flora (2008) imply this existence of heterogeneity among America's rural communities, which is divergent to Baldwin's notion.

The dominant culture is controlled and sustained by those in the rural community who hold power and influence within that culture – which can be the rural community or the rural school community (Flora & Flora, 2008; Miller, 1995). Further, those with power and influence center the dominant culture within the framework and influence of their espoused values giving way to increased and often sustained power. Moreover, these espoused values, through the sharing by family, community, and group legacies, reaffirm the cultural and social advantages and disadvantages of those in the present day.

As an example, in 1887, the Dawes Act was enacted and passed with the particular aim of the United States, as the dominant culture to replace the "unproductive" (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 57) cultural capital of the Native Americans; forcing the Native Americans to acculturate and in some instances, eventually assimilate to the norms of White people. According to Flora and Flora (2008), the "cultural capital of those in

control negated the ability of the Native Americans to use their local cultural capital to maintain their social and economic well-being" (p. 57).

Different views of culture, using this example, may suggest the participants in each of the cultural groups were conditioned by their family, community, or group environment - inherently and willingly giving power to the dominant culture thus operationalizing "how people learn to be rural" (Theobald & Wood, 2010, p. 17). In the rural contexts, the larger community and/or the school communities (e.g., elementary, secondary, and high school) may guide these dominant cultures as the rural school is often considered the epicenter of the rural community. I explore this consideration more deeply in the next section.

Community. The rural community plays a significant role in rural places and spaces (University of Michigan, 2014). Research shows "community norms and values are more influential for rural residents than urban" (p. 1). Inhabitants of rural communities, as previously discussed, have a strong connection to their community deeply rooted in their lived experiences and the experiences of others - including friends, family, children, and ancestors (Azano, 2011; Hutchison, 2004; Smith, 2002) within their immediate sociocultural framework. Moreover, researchers have come to understand that "local culture provides a sense of identity for rural communities and residents and facilitates common understandings, traditions, and values" (Brennan, 2005, p. 1) thus adding another component in considering how individuals may learn to *be* rural.

Exceeding the boundaries of the geographical definitions, these values, norms and traditions, as we have seen to be often rooted historical narratives, have presented barriers

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to those who wish to gain economic control over the rural communities and their residents. Researchers contend rural communities have endured a longstanding struggle with federal government entities in order to preserve and sustain control over and maintain integrity of their local community culture (Flora & Flora, 2008). Rural inhabitants often feel their voice is largely ignored by these federal government entities relative to their non-rural counterparts (Center for Rural Affairs, 2013).

This longstanding struggle for control between the federal government and rural communities, according to researchers, has begun to ease and some rural inhabitants have slowly initiated the deconstruction of cultural barriers as a factor of viewing government involvement as one that is essential for economic viability and sustainability. Nevertheless, the depth to which the federal government entities are permitted to be involved is conditional as the Center for Rural Affairs (2013) reported:

> It is too simplistic to believe rural America is anti-government and that there is nothing for progressives to say, nor is it possible to say that rural America wants bigger government and more spending. They want tax breaks, but they also support increased loans and grants to help people gain skills and open small businesses. They want more efficient and effective government and view much of public policy as a fairness issue in which rural America has not received fair treatment. (para. 6)

What remains missing from some of the rural community researcher discussions is the inclusion of education and its importance in ensuring the sustainability of a life that some rural Americans find "worth fighting for" (Center for Rural Affairs, 2013, para. 2).

Value of Education and Value of Community

The federal government, through the U.S. Department of Education, has taken steps to support the plight of education within rural communities by developing a number

of resources including the Rural Education Resource Center which houses resources for teachers, parents and families, reform, and college affordability (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), and publishing discussions like *Rural Education is Being Rewritten* (Bajgier, 2013). These published resources, along with increasing attention on rural by some federal government entities and their members, are contributing factors in rural inhabitants deconstructing their previously held notions and barriers.

The rural community has a strong influence on the importance, value, and approach of education and "in order for rural communities to succeed, they must allow its members to have good paying jobs, access to healthcare, quality education, and strong community ties" (University of Michigan, 2014, p. 1). Azano (2011) purported "while rural communities tend to have strong ties, there is a perceived tradeoff for many rural families in educational attainment: valuing education at the expense of devaluing or undermining the community" (p. 1). The unfavorable view of education as a factor in the devaluing community could be a reason some rural researchers may choose to omit an educational framework as part of their discussions. Rural researchers, by doing so, retain their community positionality and trust through alignment with members of the rural community. Further and where applicable, some rural researchers may retain their university community positionality and trust by positioning their research towards education of rural and in rural as being unimportant.

As an example, educational achievement has been largely perceived by members of the rural community as the primary problem undergirding the out-migration of rural youth to urban and metropolitan areas. This out-migration results in the decline of the

rural community population, economic stability, and in some cases community survival. Rural community members may come together to solve a problem like out-migration by drawing upon their community's cultural foundation and inspiring a sense of unified confidence and support towards a common goal (Brennan, 2005) - all while retaining community value and integrity.

Arne Duncan (2013), U.S. Department of Education Secretary, during his two-day visits to rural communities across the nation, said to schools and student leaders: "I reject the idea that rural districts are too isolated to pioneer innovation and propel powerful partnerships [and] I reject the narrative that says rural America cannot provide a rich and rigorous curriculum, or compete for attention or funding" (para. 3). So, while educational funding opportunities (i.e., Race to the Top, School Improvement Grant, and Investing Innovation (i3) competitions) exist for rural schools, bridging the gap between the opposition some members of rural communities feel towards education and the action required to obtain the benefits from these and other funding opportunities, requires the skillful knowledge and approach of the rural school leader.

Whereas out-migration may be a by-product of educational achievement, there is an underlying notion among some researchers (Miller, 1995; Nachtigal, Haas, Parker & Brown, 1989) which discusses how rural schools respond and contribute to the "growth and survival needs of their community" (Miller, 1995, p. 163) resulting in a greater chance for long-term sustainability. A number of rural advocates believe this opportunity for sustainability rests within the existing critical connection between the rural communities and their rural schools (Miller, 1995; Monk & Haller, 1986; Nachtigal et al.,

1989; Spears et al., 1990). This connection, many researchers assert, is the rural school leader (Duncan, 2012; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006; Salazar, 2007; Starr & White, 2008; Wolcott, 2003) and thus a focus on the rural school leader and his/her lived experiences may prove beneficial to the evolution of rural school leader preparation.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, I described and discussed the term *rural* through (a) government-sanctioned definitions; (b) images and perceptions of rural, which informed the groundwork for this research; (c) socially and culturally constructed historical views; and (d) a discussion of community strength and influence. While the flexibility of space is provided, the federal definitions of the term *rural* deny flexibility and encourage the homogenous, geographical interpretation of all of rural. The geographical definitions imply rural to be of a heterogeneous construct as illustrated by the OMB (2000) in their further organization of rural into three additional classifications. The media's representation of rural may be confusing for many Americans, both the individual as well as the collective groups. This confusion often stems from both the romanticized and negative images whereby the negative images often supersede those where rural is romanticized. Conversely, those who have some rural experiences may overlook these adverse images and choose to locate or relocate to a rural area. However, being rural may not be as easy as simply relocating to a rural area. It may come with the stigma of nearly always being considered an outsider, and being under near constant scrutiny by those who hold the dominant cultural power in the rural community and the rural school

community. Historical narratives, constructed by those in power, have been at odds with each other for decades. Yet, those with the belief that all of rural would eventually be urbanized maintained a considerable amount of authority and devalued rural to such a degree that many researchers, who had an interest in rural research, often concealed that interest for fear of discrimination by their colleagues and/or peers. In doing so, the importance of rural studies, over time, has also been devalued and as purported by some researchers, remains the position by some U.S. colleges and universities.

Regardless of the dominant cultural power outside of these rural communities, the rural community itself has power. This power, deeply rooted in the lived experiences of its rural inhabitants, ensures the protection and persistence of dominant, constructed identities. These identities, built through social and cultural traditions, values, and norms embedded within that community, can be formidable to an interloper. Like their identities, the rural community has a sustained and influential power over the importance of education to that community. As such, there is often a power struggle between the value of education and value of community where a side must be chosen. The authenticity of that choice, as I will demonstrate later, is subject to the rural school-leader's choice of how they will exist within the rural community and within the rural school community. In chapter three, I discuss the evolution and current state of the rural school leader role, preparation programs, their importance to rural school leader development, and how rural school principal leader preparation is essential to establishing and maintaining critical connections between the rural communities and its schools.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section explores the extant literature on the role of the rural school, rural school community culture, rural community culture, history, and evolution of the rural school leader role, along with discussion of the instructional and transformational leadership styles. The purpose of this introductory section, in part, is to bridge the descriptions of rural from the previous chapter to the discussions of the rural in this chapter as a means to frame the review and discussion of the literature. Once complete, what follows are two sections that draw attention to the literature on education funding and school leader preparation Colorado. The final section of this chapter is where I present and discuss the modified conceptual framework engaged to frame this study.

The Rural School and Community Trust (2014) reports 32.9% of schools in the United States are considered rural. This percentage translates to just over twelve million rural K-12 students. The rural schools needed to serve this population require a multifaceted leader, and as I discuss a bit later in this chapter, is one who can serve the needs of its students, faculty and staff, the community, ensure the school remains in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations, and where applicable, prevent the community's extinction. As daunting as the informal role description, so is leading a Colorado rural school.

The rural school leader's role description alone, may be just enough to encourage Colorado's school leader aspirants to redirect their attention towards suburban or urban school districts or to reconsider their school leader aspirations altogether. The Colorado Department of Higher Education Legislative Educator Preparation Report (2015) points out; there has been a 52.45% decline in the number of enrollments in the administrator licensure programs since 2010. The lowest year being 2012 where only 20 enrollments were recorded; a 67.21% decline from 2010 where 61 enrollments were recorded. In line with this sharp decline in administrator licensure, enrollments in Colorado's principal preparation programs have experienced a decline, but not as severe. There has been an 11.56% decline from 2010 to 2014; where 2013 reflected the lowest decline on record for this period citing just slightly more than 760 enrollments, which is a 17.71% decline from just over 925 enrollments recorded in 2010.

According to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in October 2014, a state-wide total of 178 school districts exist; a slight decline from 183 school districts reported for 2007 (CDE, 2011). Of Colorado's 178 school districts, 148 or 80% have a classification of rural or small rural. In short, this means more students distributed among fewer school districts and fewer schools. The 148 school districts, reported by CDE (2014) educate more than 150,000 of Colorado's rural and small rural students; totaling approximately "20% of Colorado's students" (para. 2) overall. The Rural School Community Trust (2014) reported Colorado to have just over 122,000 rural school students in the 2010-2011 school year. Thus, data reveals an increase of just over 28,000 in a four-year span from 2010 through 2014. In comparison with the state's population

increase, from 2000 through 2014 there has been a 24.52% increase (just over one

million) in the overall state's population (U.S. Census, 2014).

In short, Colorado is experiencing an increase in the number of rural students but

the count of rural schools and school leader aspirants, in general, is decreasing – a

dilemma worthy of study. Therefore, what follows is an exploration and discussion of

extant literature in an effort to gain a greater awareness of this dilemma facing not only

rural communities and their schools, but also Colorado's legislators, state-level education

leaders, universities, colleges, and organizations who have administrator and/or principal

preparation programs.

Recalling from chapter one, I define the term *rural school leader* as one that is

any person whose role title could include, but may not be limited to: (a) school principal;

(b) school director; (c) head of school; (d) a dual role of superintendent and principal; or

(e) a role that broader in scope and includes superintendent, principal, and teacher. The

purpose for this more expansive definition is to acknowledge and be inclusive of the

diverse rural structures. This approach is an early and reasonably obscure demonstration

of the uniqueness of rural by explicating both the differences and the similarities in job

titles as points of discussion and by removing perceptions and assumptions that may

accompany definitional boundaries. Moreover, it should be noted that my general

definition of the rural school leader, is to provide some semblance of simplicity in the

following chapters. The definition should not suggest to the reader that I view rural or the

characteristics of the school leaders as homogenous. In some circumstances, I use the

term *principal leader,* as it is appropriate to the literature from which I draw and in other instances, I use the term *rural school leader*.

Role of the Rural School

The role of the rural school has evolved over time to one that is place-responsive. Suggested by Theobald and Nachtigal (1995), "the work of the rural school is no longer to emulate the urban or suburban school but to attend to its own place" (p. 1). The work itself plays a significant role in informing and influencing the sustainability of the rural community, often extending beyond providing basic education. This notion is traced backed to the early 1900's in Colorado and according to DeYoung (2002), "from the colonial days until the Industrial Revolution, most Americans resisted compulsory or required by law, public education" (p. 2). By the early 1900's, rural inhabitants "often declined the opportunity to fully fund academic programs in country high schools, preferring instead to support vocational programs and extracurricular events and activities" (p. 2). The evolution from the notion of a basic education to one that is vocational in nature begins to illustrate the focus of rural education as one that is more place-responsive.

The rural school, as Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) purport, is the foundation of the rural community, and a symbol of power and stability essential to the rural community's survival. Supporting this notion, Miller (1995) suggests rural schools, not unlike their past roles, serve as a "cultural center in the community where athletics, drama programs, music, and other social activities play a vital part in community life and identity" (p. 164). Other rural researchers, along with grassroots organizations who

advocate for rural, firmly assert a similar ideology reporting rural schools are the

foundational institution that holds together the rural community (Center for Rural Affairs,

2000; Flora & Flora, 2008; Lyson, 2002). Thus, the rural school leader role takes on a

more complex dimension. Should the rural school leader fail in his or her role, the

adverse effects of this failure are likely to cause a ripple effect that begins with the rural

school community (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) and extends to the rural community –

resulting in not only the possible extinction of the rural community, but also the rural

school and rural community cultures. By extension, the extinction of the rural community

leaves those undeveloped rural identities orphaned and in search of new and perhaps

similar places and spaces to continue development.

Rural School Culture

In order to gain insight into the rural school culture, it is essential the term *culture*

be given context within the rural school community. Gorton and Alston (2009) provide

the definition of culture as "social or normative glue that holds an organization (e.g., rural

school) together" (p. 155). Schein (2010), aligned with researchers Groton and Alston

(2009), suggest organizational (e.g., rural school) culture is created through a host of

actions by leaders and it is the entrenched assumptions of the school leader that "create

the conditions for culture formation and evolution" (p. 257). The link between culture

and leadership according to Schein (2010), "is clearest in organizational cultures and sub-

cultures, where culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately

manipulated by leaders" (p. 3). Hence, the role of the rural school leader in the rural

school community has a tremendous amount of power and influence in shaping the

school and community's culture. Thus, the person in the rural school leader role must balance the cultural desires informed by their own lived experiences with those made clear by the rural community and the rural school community – all within the boundaries of federal, state, and local regulations.

A "school's culture consists of meanings shared by those inhabiting the school as well, schools may include several sub-cultures: for example, a student sub-culture and a professional staff sub-culture" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 3) whereby sub-culture is defined as an "occupational group within [the] organization" (Schein, 2010, p. 2). Under the guidance of the rural school leader, rural school culture should be clearly written, flexible, well structured, and clearly communicated in order to reduce opportunity for conflict, inconsistency, and confusion. By doing so, an organization's reform, subsequent re-growth, and eventual maturity will result in institutionalization; whereby mechanisms (e.g. structure, procedures, rituals, and formally espoused values) that were once identified as secondary in the emergence of a new organization, are now considered primary (Schein, 2010) in the course of its evolution.

Once the rural school culture is established, Zucker (1977) proposed the influence of a cultural persistence framework to explain the adoption, internalization, and eventual sustainability of "norms which are central to the institution" (p. 727). Successful integration of a new culture or influence for cultural change requires the rural school's leader to conduct an analysis of the existing organizational culture and develop "a good understanding of what cultural elements the rural school represents" (Gorton & Alston, 2009, p. 156). It is these organizational culture elements that in part, inform the vision for

the rural school within the rural community, carried out through the role of the rural school leader. To carry out the cultural elements analysis, cultural change, and subsequent adoption and integration, Barley and Beesley (2007) suggest rural school leaders meet and collaborate with key community informants to "establish a set of clear goals between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, and the community and the school" (p. 4). These set of defined goals will become the cultural road map guiding the rural school community constituents. However, the effort to create or change to school culture is not without its complications. Researchers Garton and Alston (2009) contend the creation and management of the school culture is one of the key roles of the school's leader but is often complicated by multiple factors (i.e., history of the organization, characteristics of the organization members, and current problems and external demands) within the organizational culture as Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1. *Relevant Theoretical Perspectives of Culture*
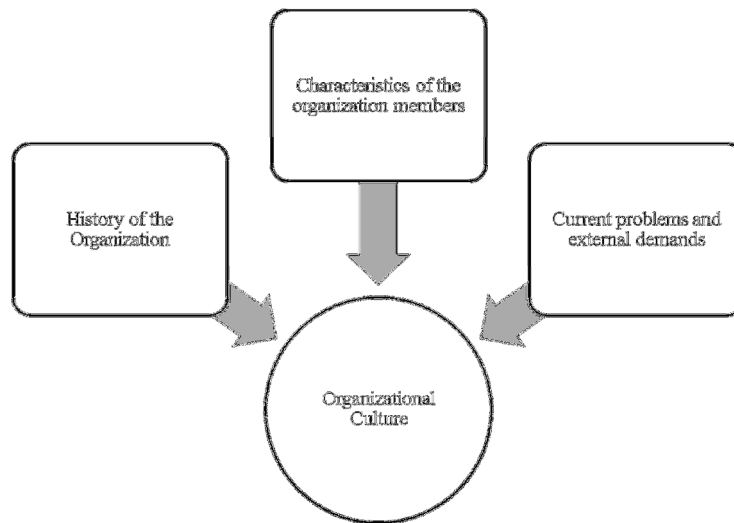
Figure 1. Source: Garton, R., & Alston, J.A. (2009). School leadership and administration: Important concepts, case studies & simulations (8th ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.

These multiple factors may be conflicting or ignored based, in part, on inherent hegemonic assumptions by the rural school leader based on their prior lived experiences (Murphy & Seashore-Louis, 1994), external influences (Schein, 2010), or possibly knowledge acquired through participation in leader (administrator and/or principal licensure) preparation programs (Tierney, 2008). Schein (2010) asserts the notion that any set of conflicted or inconsistent assumptions on the part of the rural school leader "become part of the culture or become the basis for subcultures and countercultures" (p. 257).

Culture, as previously mentioned, is one of the key success elements within the rural school community that needs ongoing attention by the rural school leader. In order to ensure cultural persistence, as suggested by Zucker (1977), a collaborative, consistent, and continued level of effort between the rural school constituents is essential. Moreover, I feel this level of effort is underpinned by the rural school community's acknowledgement that their organizational structure is dynamic; always evolving and changing as proposed by Gorton and Alston (2009). It is through the school leader's efforts and influences, that an established rural school community culture must then be carefully balanced through the emergence of a new set of norms, values, traditions, and expectations as the rural school community evolves in response to its socioecological influences.

Rural Community

A number of authors have determined that community can best be described as a collection of people who may or may not share the same geographical location but who

are organized about commonly held beliefs, interests, and attributes that collaborate to inform a shared sense of identity (Brown & Schafft, 2010; Flora & Flora, 2008; Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, Smith, 2011). However, this definition of community seems to take on a different role when applied to a rural community. As Barley and Beesley (2007) firmly argue, "the [rural] school *is* the community; community members and school personnel share the perception that if the school were closed, the community would essentially cease to exist" (p. 9). This theory, as an example, has been realized in both Alaska and Maine. According to the Alaskan Dispatch (2012), "twenty-seven rural Alaska schools have shut down in the last 13 years" (DeMarban, p. 1) and in the January 31, 2014 issue of BDN Maine Midcoast, "50, primarily rural Maine towns, have closed their elementary schools since 1996" (p. 1).

When a rural school is closed, families with children may need to move to an area where their children's education can be continued unless the next available school is nearby where transportation, often through bussing, is available. The rural school closure also has an emotional effect on the rural school community inhabitants (e.g., students, teachers, administration) and the larger rural community as they reflect on the past. For example, one Frankfort, Maine resident stated: "[The rural school] closure leaves a hole in town" and another stated, "[the rural school] is a huge part of the community" and "whenever we have special events in the evening, it's amazing how many people come out" (Curtis, 2014, p.1).

A number of authors, as previously mentioned, believe the rural school to be a central figure within the larger rural community and in the cases of the rural Maine

schools, this belief is well-evidenced. In less extreme cases where rural schools may not

be closed but may be experiencing financial constraints, Starr and White (2008) report,

leaders within rural districts often collaborate with each other and with the larger rural

community for resources and support in an effort to increase the likelihood of completing

direct and indirect tasks linked to their school leader role. This intentional collaboration,

as Chance and Segura (2009) assert, influences relationship building among the rural

community inhabitants and may further place the rural community school as the central

figure within the larger rural community. Further, Chance and Segura (2009) suggest the

intentional relationship building by rural school leader assists with the navigation of

accomplishing tasks associated with their role and encourages the connection of the rural

school community and the larger rural community.

Having an ability to establish and foster an intentional and supportive relationship

between the larger rural community and the rural school community in order to facilitate

the decisions necessary ensure progress, is but one of the many strengths the rural school

leader must possess (Chance and Segura, 2009). This ability alone is not enough. The

school leader must work to strengthen and sustain this connection between the rural

community and its school in order for it to flourish within this rural environment. The

amount of time and energy this community-to-school connection takes, has led some

rural school leaders to "believe their small rural community has unrealistic expectations

for them and the school" (Duncan, 2012, p. 20). Barley and Beesley (2007) support this

belief by suggesting the ability of the rural school leader to remain the link between the

larger rural community and rural school is critical to the success of his/her role and

further contend that, "successful rural schools result from the leadership these leaders

provide within the context of the local environment" (p. 10). Here, the point to be made is

the rural school leader is just as, if not more important than, the rural school in the

context of the rural community's successes, failures, and ultimate sustainability.

However, the community's unrealistic expectations of the rural school and the rural

school leader may fracture the community-to-school link if the rural school leader is no

longer able to withstand the pressures and leaves their role. This will be explored a bit

later in the chapter.

History of the School Principal Leader

Attention on the rural school leader and the role they fulfill has increased in recent

years. This attention has resulted in an increase in the realization that the role of the rural

school leader and the person, who serves in that role, is significant. This significance,

more importantly, is one that now extends its reach far beyond the walls of the rural

school but in the past, was not always the position. "The role of the principal in US

schools has not always been one of importance (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2007,

p. 2). Beck and Murphy (1993) report in the early 1800's, the role of principal did not

exist and teachers, who reported to board members who made all of the school's

administrative decisions, performed the day-to-day clerical and janitorial responsibilities.

Over time, the board required additional assistance and appointed a controlling head of

the school or "principal teacher" (Goodwin et al., 2007) who often served in additional

community roles like touch clerk, bell ringer for the church, gravedigger, and official

visitor of the sick (Drue, 1981).

Goodwin, Cunningham, and Eagle (2007) and Seyfarth (1999) advise that late in nineteenth century, schools began to show evidence of school-related bureaucratic practices in large cities, which would later give way to the formation of the formal principal leadership role early in the twentieth century. Pierce (1935), over six decades earlier, recognized bureaucratic evidence to be causal in nature and cited the reasons to be:

> the rapid growth of cities, the grading of schools, the consolidation of departments under a single principal, the freeing of the principal from teaching duties, recognition of the principal as the supervisory head of the school, and finally, the establishment of the Departments of Elementary-School and Secondary-School Principals within the National Education Association. (p. 7)

History reveals the evolution of the school leader role as one that is connected to the zeitgeist of the times. Tyack and Hansot (1982) suggested, public school leadership evolved in the early-to-mid 1900's to more of a "professional manager - concerned with making school management more scientific and businesslike and more progressive" (pp. 15-16). To further support this notion, Beck and Murphy (1993) outline the changes specific to the principal role in each decade identifying the role as a values broker in the 1920's to a bureaucratic executive in the 1960's and ending where role is today as instructional leader (see Appendix S for a decade-by-decade view).

Recently, historian Kate Rousmaniere (2009), proposed the role of the principal has not progressed in the last thirty years citing: "social and economic contexts have changed the principals' work practices, responsibilities, and status, but the main role of the principal has remained essentially the same: to implement state educational policy to the school and to manoeuvre [maneuver], buffer and maintain the stability of the school

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culture at the local level" (p. 220). I do not disagree and reasons for this disagreement are explored a bit later. Some authors have researched the history and evolution of the principalship and arrived, largely, at the same conclusion as Rousmaniere. However, the role and reach of the school leader has expanded even further to one that is growing more "difficult, time-consuming, and pivotal" (Kafka, 2009, p. 318) and largely more complex (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2007).

These complexities arise from the growing demands of their role situated in their individual sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts of the school and communities for which they serve. These sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts add another layer of complexity to the school leader role; contexts that are deeply and individually rooted in their sociological, sociocultural, and socioeconomic environments and as Rousmaniere (2009) suggests. She states, "Principals cannot individually overcome the economic and social contexts in which their students live" (p. 220). Her firm stance implies all rural is, here too, economically homogenous and alone, does not leave space for much hope in measuring the success of the school leader. However, in collaboration with what the literature tells us about rural, we can lean into the development of a greater awareness of rural – both in general and within the constructs of its nuanced contexts. In doing so, there is a chance to re-imagine the rural school leader by how they interact within their dynamic rural ecologies towards a different way of preparation.

As an example, applying this notion to a rural school leader who may not have the educational or exposure to rural may find they are attempting to make meaning and reconcile what is their reality against what is tacitly known; grounded in their prior lived

experiences. An inability to make meaning may offer an opportunity for the rural school leader to be unsuccessful at deconstructing this new reality and reconstructing it in a manner in which the core components of the information are not reconciled between what is known and what is believed. The outcome of the rural school leader's inability to make new meaning may result in role confusion, perception of ineffectiveness by self, the rural school community, and the rural community leading to eventual role departure.

Role Complexity. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, (2002) and Luo (2008) discuss the complexities of the principal leader role as connected to six administrative areas: (a) "school vision; (b) instruction; (c) organization; (d) collaborative partnership; (e) moral perspective; and (f) larger-context politics" (p. 607). In order to address these areas, the school leader needs to have more than a rudimentary understanding of their role and how it informs the current and future operation of the school and sustainability of the community. Applying the sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts, the role of today's rural school leader is more daunting than his or her antecedents.

Lynch (2012) takes a step further and discusses the school leader role expansion and identifies a high-level outline of transactional requirements guiding today's school leaders. As a subset of the aforementioned six administrative areas suggested by ELCC (2002) and Luo (2008), these intra-organizational transactions include management of (a) human capital which includes staff, teachers, and students; (b) "government and public relations; (c) finance; (d) instruction; (e) academic performance; and (f) cultural and strategic planning" (p. 40). However, these transactions without help, do not make a

successful school leader, cites Crews and Weakly (1995) saying: "show me a good school and I'll show you a good school leader [and] when you poke into the inner workings of a successful school, you will find without fail - a skillful [school] leader who understands how to transform educational practice, not just transact educational business" (p. 5). This leads into the notion of school leadership style to be one that is more transformational, which is a departure from the role primarily defined as instructional (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Rousmaniere, 2009).

As I have begun to demonstrate through literature, the role of the school leader is growing exceedingly complex. However, regardless of the level of complexity, researchers argue the role of the rural school leader is one that is more unique than that of its suburban or urban counterparts given the rise in attention in recent years to the status of rural education. As asserted by Chance and Lingren (1988), "overlooking the rural school can lead to an erroneous assumption that all school leaders behave in the same manner regarding the operation of their schools" (p. 23). This assumption is reported in an annual report on the status of rural education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013; The Rural School and Community Trust; 2010/14).

The periodic publication of *Why Rural Matters* by The Rural School and Community Trust, the U.S. Department of Education's development and deployment of the Rural Education Resource Center website and related rural-centric programs (i.e., Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP); Small, Rural School Achievement Program; and the Rural and Low-Income School Program), and the establishment of the White House Rural Council on June 9, 2011 by President Obama, is evidence that the

significance of rural, at a national level, is budding in awareness, acknowledgement, and acceptance. Disappointingly, President Obama's rural education budget which funds the REAP, Small, Rural School Achievement, and the Rural and Low-Income School programs has remained unchanged at "$169.8 million" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 25) in 2014, 2015, and is the budget amount requested for the 2016. No explanation was provided in the budget summary to indicate why the budget amounts have not changed.

Why this is disappointing is linked to the increase in the national rural population from 2000 to 2010 and a significant increase in small area poverty, according to U.S. Census reports (2015). They report a less than one percent (.73%) increase in the rural population; translated to just under 431,000 from 2000 (59,061,367) to 2010 (59,492,267). If the national rural education budget amount was increased to respond to the population in kind, this would result in a budget increase of nearly $1.2 million dollars ($169.8 ×.0073). However, with no increase to the budget, this means less funding to stretch across more students. Further, the U.S. Census (2015) in their published 2013 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Report, indicates "31 percent [987 out of 3,142 counties], had a statistically significant increase in poverty between 2007 and 2013 (p. 1). The point to draw from this is the attention to rural is growing in awareness, acknowledgement, and acceptance at the same time the population and poverty rates also increase – which is positive. However, an absence of any financial response to these known increases by the federal government reveals the implication that

the state, local rural communities, and the rural school leaders must find a way to attend to increases with less financial and non-financial resources.

Role of the Rural School Leader

The role of the rural school leader is complex in nature and has a remarkable amount of power and responsibility metaphorically placed on his or her shoulders. This complexity is translated and traced back to several important leader affected areas. DeRuyck (2005) asserts "the challenges rural principals face stem from a number of sources, including principal preparedness and supply, principal professional development, school-based challenges, and community-related challenges" (p. 4). In rural contexts, the role of the school leader, not unlike its non-rural counterparts, is multifaceted and it is difficult, if not impossible for a school leader to assume his/her primary role as instructional leader (Lynch, 2012); which has been the assumed role since the mid-1980's (Beck & Murphy, 1993). The difficulties occur when there is often not enough time during the course of a workday to balance tasks associated with the primary role and the far-reaching non-administrative tasks. However, regardless of the tasks they complete or the roles they assume, rural school leaders, above all else, remain faced with meeting the standards and obligations associated with federal, state, and local (district) legislation.

Chance and Lingren (1988) further suggest that rural school leadership approaches and styles varies widely but essentially, she or he must undertake the appropriate role to address the challenges and to get the job done; most often leaving instructional leadership behind. These challenges faced by the rural school leader include

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the reduced possibility of devoting time to "reflecting on the academic health" (p. 62) of his/her school due to budgetary limitations; as schools in rural spaces may not often permit the addition of an assistant principal or other human resources to offer relief from known, expected, and unexpected non-administrative tasks (e.g., maintaining discipline, general manager duties, meeting with teachers, meeting with parents, and/or fixing a leaky roof).

The non-administrative tasks the rural school leader assumes and time associated with those tasks, works against the leader (Leithwood, 1994). As an example, a task-oriented leader has minimal time to devote to providing intellectual stimulation, and/or providing individualized support. As such, on the surface, it may appear rural schools make less student achievement progress each year as compared to their non-rural counterparts and thus the role and effectiveness of the rural school leader may be perceived as inadequate by those who are internal or external to rural contexts.

Contrary to this notion, the 2009 and 2011 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) reading achievement levels for the fourth grade revealed rural students are reading at a proficient level - illustrating an increase of a full percent while their non-rural counterparts increased less than one percent. These achievement levels are a departure from Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2010) suggested notion that "rural and working-class cultures do not score above the conventional level" (p. 109). While the federal geographical definition of rural has remained static since 1910, the roles, responsibilities, and levels of authority for a rural school leader, along with complex sociocultural and socioeconomic constructs, have continued to evolve. Progress

in fourth grade reading achievement levels year-over-year, suggests rural school leaders

may be leveraging other sources for funding (e.g., state, local communities mill levy's

and obligations bonds) to offset where federal education funding may fall short.

The number of administrative and non-administrative tasks, federal, state, and

local accountability pressures, and maintaining community relationships are just some of

the complications rural school leaders face. While the rural contexts for a number of rural

community inhabitants inspires a sense of belonging, some of today's rural school leaders

claim they feel "dislocated and alienated from debates about education policy-making,

whereas previously they felt more involved, connected, and integral to the business of

making a difference and setting direction" (Starr & White, 2008, p. 5). This perception of

displacement may be a contributing factor to the departure of rural school leaders from

their roles in search of a place where they feel they have a greater sense of belonging. As

such, it is vital that policymakers understand that these rural school leaders are important

to the sustainability and in some cases, the survival of their rural community's (Barley &

Beesley, 2007).

Apart from the pressures connected with isolation, a reduced sense of belonging

and rural community survival and sustainability, rural school leaders must contend with

more comprehensive forces such as "(a) isolation from unique services often offered in

larger schools; (b) reduced or even limited accessibility to staff advancement and

university services; (c) qualified teacher shortages across critical academic areas; (d)

decreasing student enrollment which leads to decreased school funding; and (e) a

declining pool of qualified administrative candidates" (Wallin & Reimer, 2008, p. 593).

These pressures, whether individual or combined, may hinder the success of the rural school leader.

According to a report issued by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009), there are ten fundamentals that every rural school should have in place. These elements are:

> (a) college and work-ready curriculum for all students; (b) personal attention for all students; (c) extra help for those who need it; (d) bringing the real world to the classroom; (e) family and community involvement; (f) fostering a safe learning environment; (g) skilled teachers; (h) strong leaders, (i) necessary resources (e.g., books, computers, technology, and safe transportation); and (j) user-friendly information for parents and the community. (pp. 4-6)

When considering the scope of challenges that rural school leaders face and comparing them against the suggested ten elements (AEA, 2009), every rural school should have in place, there is a discernible misalignment. Most of the fundamentals mentioned require human and/or monetary resources that, based on financial constraints plaguing rural communities - motivated in part by a reduced student enrollment, may be difficult to acquire. As a result, the rural school leader may take it upon himself/herself to close those resource gaps through the expansion of his/her role. Starr and White (2008), through their research of the small rural principalship, cite rural school leaders "complain they have to do more with less" (p. 4) and have greater concerns around "workload proliferation, educational equity, re-defined principalship, escalating role multiplicity, and school survival" (p. 3). This is a reasonable complaint in Colorado given the increase rural populations with decreases increase in rural education funding.

These concerns have implications for the future of the rural school leader as the increasing workload, reduced financial support, and limited availability of human resources may present a negative view of the role by those "aspirants who see the

principalship as requiring too much effort for too little reward" (Starr & White, 2008, p. 4). The reduction in resources across rural schools is forcing rural school leaders to find more creative ways to fulfill their role obligations. These creative ways have included turning to the larger rural community for assistance, collaboratively engaging other district rural school leaders, and expanding the reach of their role in an effort to close the resource gaps and meet the rural school and rural community needs.

Dual Leader Role

As discussed in the prior section, the role of the rural school leaders is filled with complexities and is arguably, not improving. Later, I will discuss some of the role responsibilities Colorado's rural school leaders indicate they perform – almost daily. The number of responsibilities alone, suggest the rural school leader to be more of a superhero. Copland (2001) along this same notion discussed the "myth of the super-principal" (p. 528) as a dilemma that has created such "unreasonably high expectations for the role of the school principal" (Eckman, 2004, p. 193). These expectations, in terms of performance, may not always be fairly measured. As covered in the literature by many researchers and what will be demonstrated in a later chapter, the notion of a rural school leader role as being unique is nothing new. In response to those who serve in distinctive school leader roles, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) published guidance in January 2014. Here, CDE (2014) acknowledges these role distinctions by saying:

> We know that not all teachers, principals or administrators fall neatly into one evaluation category and many have very different job responsibilities across the state. Knowing this, it is important to match the right evaluation tool with the educator's job responsibilities and expected outcomes. (pp. 2-3)

This published guidance is organized into thirteen different role possibilities including superintendents serving as principals serving as athletic directors (i.e., coaches) or deans, and principals serving as teachers just to name a few. Principals serving as teachers, deans, and/or athletic directors are to be evaluated against the seven principal evaluation standards (Colorado Department of Education, 2014; 2013). These standards, adopted in 2011 for implementation in 2013, measures Colorado's principals and assistant principals on their demonstrations of strategic, instructional, cultural and equity, human resources, managerial, external development, and student learning leadership (Colorado Department of Education, 2013) practices. Missing from the evaluation standards, however, is how and by what means superintendents are to be evaluated.

As instructed by CDE, within their published unique role guidance (2014), those leaders who serve in a dual role as both superintendent and principal, are to be evaluated through a "locally designed superintendent evaluation" (Colorado Department of Education, 2014, p. 4). CDE further instructs the district and/or school board towards the use of the principal evaluation as a benchmark to aid in their evaluation tool development. Reflecting on this direction by CDE towards a recommendation for further study, is the determination by local school boards on how and by what parameters their local rural school leaders will be evaluated. This recommendation for further study should include who is responsible for the development of the evaluation tool, who conducts the evaluation, and the accountability measures supporting how the school board is evaluated.

The Eagle County Schools superintendent and self-proclaimed Chief Learner, Jason E. Glass, published proposed standards for superintendent evaluation in June 2013 for the 2013 – 2014 school year. These published proposed standards include "leadership and vision; continuous improvement; communications and collaboration; policies and governance; instruction; resource management; and ethics" (Glass, 2013, pp. 2-3). Eagle schools are classified as rural (Colorado Department of Education, 2013) and have "nearly 6,800 students enrolled from preschool through the 12th grade. Visited by Bill and Melinda Gates in 2012, the [Eagle county school] District has been heralded as a model for the Nation in terms of measuring the success of students and teachers. In addition, Eagle Valley High School ranked in the top 10% of high schools across the Nation for career and college readiness" (Eagle County Schools, 2013, para. 1). As a note, Eagle County, in terms of wealth, is ranked seven out of sixty four counties in the state and is ranked in the top 50 in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013). The status on whether or not this proposal was accepted or rejected was not available as of March 1, 2015.

While the non-rural school leader role is filled with complications and complexities, rural school leader role complications are intensified and more pervasive. I contend these complications have larger implications for identifying effective leadership style(s) and gaining a deeper awareness of rural school leader preparation as "rural principals understand that performing in their jobs is not just *what* they do, but *how* they do it" (Starr & White, 2008, p. 10). This *how* can be connected to the rural school leader's perceptions and sense of agency, where agency, according to Biesta and Tedder

(2006), has been understood as "an educational aim and educational ideal and as the desired outcome of educational processes" (p. 5). Agency in this context and as supported by the literature, can be connected back to the relationships the rural school leader has with a number of socioecological elements like rural culture, rural community, and the rural school – all intersecting to inform the lived experiences of the rural school principal leader.

Identifying the depth and breadth of these relationships that exist not only between each of the socioecological elements, but also in relation to the rural school leader's lived experiences, I contend provides a measurable step towards the development of a contextualized approach to rural school leader development. This approach, as I see it, includes a core set of rural-responsive curricula further supported by a sequence of elective courses, which are designed to provide both the rural school leader and the rural school leader aspirant with a place-responsive education. In doing so, the leadership effectiveness of the rural school leader can be examined as a function of their individual contextualized preparation and not by preparation that is influenced by a non-rural hegemonic discourse.

Leadership Defined

There exists a significant amount of literature, data, books, articles and more on the definitions, types, ideologies, and effectiveness of school leadership. Pouring through the literature, the basic premises of leadership between the multiple definitions were uncovered and considered similarly supported by a basic definition. The Oxford English

Dictionary (2015) defines leadership as "the position of a group of people leading or influencing others within a given context" (para. 1).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) expound on the basic definition and operationalize the term in a manner, which includes contextually dynamic considerations. These researchers posit five practices within the framework and concept of "exemplary leadership" (p. 13) and operationalize each practice within the context of an organization. Kouzes and Posner (2007), cite "exemplary leaders to: (a) model the way; (b) inspire a shared vision; (c) challenge the process; (d) enable others to act; and (e) encourage the heart" (p. 14). The purpose for using this more critical definition of leadership is to provide a more expansive and flexible view on the term giving way for consideration of rural school leaders within their multiple dimensions and contexts.

A number of educational researchers have produced a body of literature which provides empirical evidence behind the belief that principal leadership overall, is a contributing element towards the accomplishments of most any school (Bass, 1996, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Chance & Lingren, 1988; Hallinger, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Korach, 2012; Leithwood; 2012; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). While evidence suggests different types of leadership styles exist, the appropriate selection and application of a particular leadership style may be misaligned to the context and complexity of the environment (Change & Lingren, 1988). Alternatively, as I discuss a bit later, the instructional leadership style that has been the prominent approach for nearly two decades is subjected to deterioration at the figurative hands of financial and non-financial resource constraints.

Instructional Leadership

Emerging in the mid-1980's as a leadership style, the principal leader's role evolved from humanistic facilitator to instructional leader (Beck & Murphy, 1993) and proliferation of this evolution could also be found in rural schools. This is evidenced through rural school leader research conducted by Chance and Lingren (1988), whereby 64% of the schools leaders indicated their primary role was to "act as an instructional leader" (p. 24) and not much has changed in recent years as researchers assert this particular leadership style remains present among principal leaders today (Chance & Lingren, 1988; Chance & Segura, 2009; Hallinger, 2010). It is noted that while existing literature cites the 1980's as the emergence of instructional leadership, Bridges (1967) discussed his view of instructional leadership that would later link school improvement, the use of technology, and instructional leadership (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Hallinger, 2010; Robertson, 2013).

Instructional leadership, according to Hallinger (2010), is a function of the school leader role and has three dimensions:

> (a) defining the school's mission (including framing and communicating school goals); (b) managing the instructional program (including the supervision and evaluation of instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress); and (c) promoting a positive learning environment (including protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, enforcing academic standards, and providing incentives for students). (p. 225)

The impetus for the development of this individual leadership model was the rooted in the expansion of federal policy, school reform guiding improvement in student achievement, and growing demands on accountability. Around 2000, accountability for

improvement in student achievement had evolved to a point whereby school leaders were given an "explicit expectation that they will function as instructional leaders" (Hallinger, 2010, p. 222) further supported by the No Child Left Behind Act (2002).

The view of instructional leadership began to shift (Horng & Loeb, 2010) from the day-to-day tasks associated with teaching and learning to a more strategic approach focusing more on "organizational management for instructional improvement" (p. 66). Informing this change, is a report from the Wallace Foundation (2010) citing "another problem in secondary schools; principals report particularly severe time constraints – instructional leadership often the casualty" (p. 2). The results found within the Wallace Foundation (2010) report compared against the results found by Horng and Loeb (2010) which covered data collection from more than "800 principals, 1,100 assistant principals, 32,000 teachers, and more than 250 full-day observations and comprehensive interviews of principals" (p. 67), supports this evolved view of instructional leadership as one that is more expansive and guided by strategic management, transactional awareness, and analysis within the dynamic organization (e.g., rural school).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is defined as a foundational underpinning through which leaders choose to act collaboratively through the empowerment of their followers by aligning the goals and objectives of the follower's to the goals and objectives of the group with whom the followers are a part, the leader, and the larger organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Strauss, T, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Educational researchers have found that school leaders, who

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adopt a transformational leadership style, have more encouraging and beneficial effects

on the school (Ross & Gray, 2006) supporting what Bass (1985) argued for, citing

"transformational leaders can be directive, participative, authoritarian, or democratic,

depending upon the context" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005, p. 178).

Applying transformational leadership to a rural school context has been suggested

by researchers as one that is bifurcated between administrative leaders and teachers.

Anderson (2008, 2004, 2002) expanded on the earlier work of Leithwood and Jantzi

(1977) arguing "rural school teachers have influenced rural schools to the point, in some

cases, the entire organization was transformed" (p. 9) where Leithwood and Jantzi

(1977), in a broader scope, also suggested and emphasized the notion of teachers as

transformational leaders. Advocates for teachers as transformational leaders argue that "a

teacher's power is essential both within and beyond the walls of the classroom" (Taylor,

Webb & Jones, 2004, p. 206) and Treslan (2006) agrees with this notion, citing

"transformational leadership by teachers does exist in the classroom where effective

teaching is practiced" (p. 62).

While the attention of this particular research focuses on the rural school leader,

there does appear to be a gap in recent literature around teachers as transformational

leaders. The concept of transformational leadership guided by the school leader is not

new to educational literature and has gained a lot of attention in recent years. However,

overlooking the teacher as an essential contributor to the transformational leadership

process has further implications for research on capacity building and the structural

marginalization (Liggett, 2010) of teachers in rural school communities. It also has

implications in rural schools where the rural school leader serves multiple roles including teacher. However, while there does appear to be a gap in the literature, the focus of this research study does not engage this issue.

In contrast to the notion of teachers as transformational leaders, school leaders as transformational leaders, has garnered a substantial volume of educational researcher attention and the reason behind it may be, as Ross and Gray (2006) contend, "transformational leadership provides a more powerful theoretical framework for interpreting principal behavior than competing frameworks such as instructional leadership" (p. 180). This is evidenced, in part, by Bayler (2012) who contends: "transformational leadership helps school principals' to frame their attitudes to move their schools forward" (p. 581) and through a number of researchers who produce literature rooted in the study of principals as transformational leaders (Anderson, 2008; Bayler, 2012; Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006, 2005, 1990; Ross & Gray, 2006; Wolcott, 2003).

This section provided an overview of the extant literature concerning the role of the rural school, rural school community culture, rural community culture, history, and role of the rural school leader, along with an ephemeral presentation of both the instructional and transformational leadership styles. The purpose was to provide a more general background of the rural school community and rural school leader through which to frame this review and discussion of the literature. What follows are two sections that draw attention specifically to the literature on education funding, school leader

preparation and where I present and discuss the modified conceptual framework engaged to frame this study.

Education Funding in Colorado

To set the metaphorical tone for this section, I draw on three rural researchers who recently asserted, "the diversity of rural America creates challenges for education policy: policy in rural communities must be nimble enough to meet the distinct needs of the unique populations within the district" (Johnson, Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2014, p. 5). Despite the notion of flexible and place-responsive policies, the following literature demonstrates this is not the stance Colorado legislators and state-education leaders frequently assume regarding education funding. This position has initiated numerous lawsuits by rural Colorado supporters, one of which lasted nearly a decade and drew national attention.

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) published a report (2005) that focused on rural school leader preparation. The crux of this report, in part, contributes to the literature in this section. The report stated, "there is a need for school district leaders and their community partners to inform state and local policymakers about both the shortage of money and leaders for rural schools" (p. 7). As of this research study, as I discuss in a later chapter, the number of leaders in Colorado are who are completing licensure programs is declining and education funding continues to plague rural school leaders.

Colorado's Financial Commitment to Rural in 2015

Prior to President Obama's 2015 State of the Union address, Colorado's

Governor, John Hickenlooper delivered his State of the State address on January 15,

2015. On the collective subject of education, the Governor cited "targeted workforce

development and a strong education system are keys to supporting a strong middle class"

("The State of Colorado, 2015", para. 97). In support of the increased strength of the

education system, he requested a one-time education budget increase of 8.1% or $480

million to support K-12 education, indicating the state's contribution at "70 percent"

(para. 98). This budget increase, along with an additional one-time $200 million

contribution from the State Education Fund will in part, increase "per-pupil education

funding by $475.58 [from $7,020.70] to $7,496.28" (The State of Colorado, 2014, para.

7). Early in the examination of the literature, I felt this increase might have been

attributed to an increased level of confidence in Colorado's strengthening economy.

Regarding Colorado's economy, the Governor states:

> Colorado's economic activity continues to outperform the national expansion.
> Total employment and personal income have steadily increased for several years
> running. The state's unemployment rate stands at 4.7 percent, the lowest since
> 2008. Looking ahead, the most likely scenario is for the momentum to continue at
> a steady pace. ("The State of Colorado, 2015", para. 3)

The efforts of Governor Hickenlooper and strengthening economy aside, this one-

time financial contribution may only provide temporary relief to rural schools and rural

schools leaders as a result of the Governor not addressing Colorado's budget shortfalls

through a more sustainable, long-term strategy. However, evidence reveals a 2014

lawsuit by the Colorado Rural Caucus, which appears to be a circumstantial factor in

Governor Hickenlooper's decision to increase per-pupil funding. More on this subject

will be covered later in this section.

Relative to higher education funding in the state, 14.1 percent or $107.1 million in

additional funds are proposed along with "$30 million for the Colorado Opportunity

Scholarship Initiative" ("The State of Colorado, 2015," para. 8), created in 2014 under

House Bill 14-1384 (Bill). The purpose of the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship

Initiative according to the details of the Bill, is to:

> 1) award scholarships or grants based upon a rigor-based method to students who
> are classified as Colorado residents for tuition purposes; and 2) develop the
> connections and community partnerships necessary to ensure that every Colorado
> student has the support needed to enter a postsecondary opportunity, persist and
> succeed, and enter his or her desired position in the workforce. (Colorado Capital
> Watch, 2014, p. 1)

These efforts, in part, are because of the NCLB and the Elementary and

Secondary Education (ESEA) Act Flexibility Waiver, approved for Colorado by

Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan in February 2012. This two-year waiver expires at

the close of the 2014-2015 school year; CDE applied for waiver renewal ahead of the

March 31, 2015 deadline. According to CDE (2014), "submitting its updated request for

ESEA flexibility, [we] hope to renew waivers of fourteen ESEA provisions and their

associated regulatory, administrative, and reporting requirements through the end of the

2017-2018 school year" (Colorado Department of Education, 2015, para. 3).

On December 29, 2014, CDE announced its plans for initiative expansion "aimed

at supporting and enhancing educational opportunities for schools and students

throughout rural Colorado" (p. 1). This initiative includes five new programs including 1)

improving teacher quality grants at a cost of $633,000; 2) beginning roundtable meetings

to support the development of the educator pipeline; 3) beginning concurrent enrollment professional development to increase teacher credentialing; 4) expanding career exploration through Colorado GEAR UP; a program to support first-time college families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds; and 5) funding and the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative, awarding approximately 11.33% or $3.4 million of the $30 million in allocated grant funds to the 2015 rural initiative.

Colorado Education Funding

In 2006, the Colorado Rural Schools Caucus (CRSC) reported a lack of financial resources reporting a reduction in rural funding and those funds being reallocated to "poor, underperforming urban districts" (p. 12). In 2011, Fox and Van Sant reported to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) a similar issue citing Colorado's rural lacks financial resources to adequately operate. The depth of this issue extends back nearly a century to 1918 when Christopher Gilbert Sargent (Professor C.G. Sargent), reported in his Rural School Improvement in Colorado, "the rural school as now organized, cannot do the work; more funds are necessary" (p. 4). Nearly a century later, the same story continues. As a note, C.G. Sargent was the Professor of Rural Education and State Director of Vocational Education at the Colorado Agricultural College now known as Colorado State University in Ft. Collins (Colorado State University, 2015).

Equitable Funding. In 1994, the Colorado School Finance Act was passed to ensure funding for an equitable education was available to every student regardless of his or her geographic location. According to the Colorado Association of School Boards (2014), "under the Act, the total per-pupil funding received by each school district

includes a 'base' per-pupil amount (base funding) that represents what it takes to educate and average student in an average [school] district" (p. 1). The 2014-2015 school year base funding amount is reported at $6,121 (CDE Public School Finance Unit, 2014, p. 3). However, this is not the final per-pupil amount that is provided to schools. This base amount is adjusted up or down by factors that include, but are not limited to: the cost of living, employee salaries and benefits costs, size of the school district, the count of At-Risk students in the school district, and the negative factor (Colorado Department of Education Public School Finance Unit, 2014).

Negative Factor. The primary element causing significant damage to Colorado's education funding is the State Budget Stabilization Factor (Colorado Department of Education Public School Finance Unit, 2014, p. 3) or affectionately renamed the negative factor. According to CDE (2014), "the negative factor was put in place in 2010-2011 by the [Colorado] legislature as a way to reduce [education] funding to school districts to balance the state budget" (para. 2) and according to the Colorado Association of School Boards (2014), "the negative factor has forced all Colorado school districts to make cuts to important educational programs" (para. 7). The loss incurred by school districts over the last five years is reported at "three billion dollars" (para. 8).

The negative factor has been the source of much inquiry and as Tracie Raney of the CSFP reports during an interview on Colorado Public Radio, "it's policy decisions that have been made that have put other parts of the state government [a]head of K-12" (Brundin, 2015, para. 3). The negative factor has also been the primary subject of Colorado court cases; the most recent filed in July 2014 by the Colorado Rural Schools

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Caucus (CRSC) citing "the CRSC has been directly harmed by the Subsection G Negative Factor" [and] "has had to spend significantly more of its time and resources advocating for increased education funding for rural districts" (Arnold & Porter LLP, 2014, p. 4).

The CRSC (2014) is a coalition of rural school districts established in 2000, to represent and advocate on behalf of Colorado's rural public schools and to promote equal education opportunities for students in rural areas. Colorado's governor, John Hickenlooper and the Commissioner of Education, Robert Hammond are the only defendants named in the CRSC initiated lawsuit. Ahead of this 2014 litigation, the negative factor made its way to Colorado's Supreme Court in 2012 as support, in part, for the allegation made by Colorado's BOCES, Colorado Rural Schools Caucus, and the Rural School Community Trust, stating "the State of Colorado's public school finance system fails to provide its rural districts with the resources that they need to meet the basic standards of educational adequacy, as defined by the State" (Brief of Amici Curiae, 2012, p. 1). Here again, the plight of rural, in general, to gain additional and equitable funding to required litigation that was eventually dismissed in early 2014 by the Supreme Court indicating there is no disparate treatment in education funding.

Rural inhabitants and their advocates, holding steady to their demands for equity in education funding, initiated new litigation. In July 2014, according to a news article by Megan Gallegos, "parents and school districts sued Colorado, claiming the state created an illegal loophole so it could cut $1 billion a year from public schools" (para.1). She further reports:

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In November 2000, the people of Colorado voted in favor of this state's future by amending our constitution to prioritize education over competing budgetary demands…this amendment (Amendment 23), now enshrined as Article IX, section 17 of the Colorado Constitution, is the subject of this lawsuit. Plaintiffs must bring this lawsuit because the General Assembly, after honoring Amendment 23 for this century's first decade, reversed course in 2010 [with the negative factor] when it began cutting almost $1 billion annually from education funding. (para. 3)

Evidence of repeated and increasing litigation, national reports challenging Colorado's fulfillment of their published school finance principles, and findings from research like this, suggests poverty in policy continues to remain a hegemonic discourse despite efforts of many fighting for equitable education funding. Interestingly, as reported nearly nine years earlier by the Institute for Educational Leadership (2005), "there is a need for school district leaders and their community partners to inform state and local policymakers about both the shortages of money and leaders for rural schools" (p. 7). In Colorado, state and local decision makers are being informed regularly and through multiple information vehicles, but the facts, allegorically, appears to be ignored and further demonstrates to rural school leaders there is a lack of care for Colorado's rural.

Here again, this is not a recent perception. In Professor C.G. Sargent's report (1918), he cites, "the rural school seemed to be a neglected field in education so far as this State [Colorado] was concerned" (p. 7). Anecdotally, his facial expression in the photo below, certainly would suggest a level of disappointment and I could only assume he would be just as sorely disillusioned as I am, in the lack of progress towards better supporting Colorado's rural over nearly the last century.

Figure 2. *Christopher Gilbert Sargent, Professor of Rural Education - January 1923*

Source. Permission for use granted by the University Historic Photograph Collection, Colorado State University, Archives, and Special Collections (see Appendix O).

D.R. Hatch, editor of the Colorado School Journal in 1914, in support of Professor C.G. Sargent, closed the July 1918 journal with a note to its readers beginning, "Who is concerned with the rural school problem?" (p. 98) and captures the severity of the problem as "[the rural school] is poorly housed; it is meanly equipped; it is weakly taught; it is miserly supported" (p. 98). Again, nearly a century later, not much has changed in the way of rural education funding. The absence of change, as I have begun to demonstrate and will continue to demonstrate throughout the rest of this study, problematizes rural to such degree that it once again begs the question, "who is concerned with the rural school problem" (p. 98)?

Education Funding Litigation. A search through Colorado's history of legal proceedings where the words '*school fund*' is mentioned in the body of the case detail, revealed sixty-five cases dating back to November 1936 (Wolters Kluwer, 2015) and up through, July 2014. Across the nation, to provide a comparison, using the same search criteria, 4,584 court cases were identified, the earliest dating back to June 1842 (Wolters

Kluwer, 2015). Distribution across the our nation's states, revealed Texas with the

greatest number of school funding related court cases at 803 or 17.52% where Hawaii

and Washington D.C. both had less than one% or only three court cases each (Wolters

Kluwer, 2015). The most notable case for Colorado is Lobato v. State. According to

National Education Access Network (2015),

> In June 2005, Children's Voices, a Colorado public-interest law firm, acting on behalf of concerned parents and financially strapped districts from across the state, filed suit, alleging that, as a result of Colorado's extremely restrictive tax laws, the state is unconstitutionally under-funding the education system by close to one billion dollars annually. The lawsuit is supported by the Colorado Education Association, the Colorado Association of School Boards, and the Colorado Association of School Executives, amongst others. Plaintiffs argue that the Colorado legislature has consistently failed to fulfill the education clause of the state constitution, which mandates a "thorough and uniform" public school system. (para. 5)

In 2013, the Colorado Supreme Court rendered the state's education funding plan

as constitutional (Wolters Kluwer, 2015). Regardless of the Supreme Court's decision,

Colorado residents remain steadfast in their hope of gaining legal support to improve

education funding. The National Education Access Network (2015) reported that a

lawsuit was filed in June 2014, which fundamentally argues, "that Colorado's so-called

'negative factor', a device used by the legislature to reduce annual K-12 spending, is

unconstitutional" (para. 9).

Another case, which served as a precursor to the long-standing Lobato case,

occurred in 1977, when:

> 68 schoolchildren from 16 different districts brought an equity suit against the Colorado State Board of Education, claiming that disparities in school funding deprived them of equal educational opportunities…the trial court sided with the plaintiffs, the Colorado Supreme Court reversed that decision in [1982] *Lujan v. Colorado State Board of Education*. The Supreme Court concluded that the state's

education clause did not require 'absolute equality in educational services or expenditures.' In addition, the court ruled that the goal of local school control was a legitimate state purpose, which justified the state's school financing system under the equal protection clause. (para. 1)

A theme that continues to surface in Colorado. The crux of this theme is that Colorado's policymakers, state education leaders, and the states uppermost arm of the legal system (i.e., Colorado Supreme Court), does not seemingly value education.

Colorado's School Finance System. The history and purpose of Colorado School Finance Project's (CSFP), as reported on their website (2015), is "founded in 1995, the CSFP's mission is to compile, collect and distribute research-based, non-partisan information and data on topics related to school finance for state and local policymakers" (para. 1). In February 2015, the Colorado School Finance Project (CSFP) published Colorado's 2012 per-pupil spending report, included as a comparison across all fifty states. Colorado reported a rank of 43 out of 50 revealing no change from 2011 and a decline in rank by six from 37 in 2010; revealing a previous 2012 total per-pupil spend of $9,020 (Colorado School Finance Project, 2015).

Comparing the annual per-pupil spending data to the number of court cases, Washington D.C. was ranked number nine and Hawaii number eighteen; both were above the U.S. average for per-pupil spending in 2012 (Colorado School Finance Project, 2015). Vermont ranked number one in annual per-pupil spending at nearly twenty thousand dollars and had thirteen court cases and Utah, at the lowest annual per-pupil spending at just over sixty-eight hundred (Education Week, 2015) listed thirty-nine court cases.

Further review of the 2012 per-pupil spending report revealed Colorado's school finance system receiving a letter grade of D+ in the category of school finance and an F

in school-related spending (Education Week, 2015). A November 2014 fact sheet,

published by means of the CDE, indicated an annual per-pupil spending amount of just

over six thousand dollars, a decline of nearly three thousand dollars from just over nine

thousand just two years earlier.

Colorado's School Finance System principles, as reported by the Colorado School

Finance Project (2012) are:

> (a) a system must be 'adequate' which is defined by the constitutional language and state statute expectations. This is inclusive of 'thorough and uniform' and the 'local control' clause; (b) a system must be 'equitable' which is defined by student equity and taxpayer equity; (c) a system must be 'sustainable' which is defined by consistent and reliable revenue; and (d) and it must be 'adaptable' which is defined by adjusting to new expectations. (p. 1)

Other Funding Sources and State-Share. The Colorado Department of

Education's Public School Finance Unit (2014) reported other funding sources in for

Colorado's schools to include, but may not be limited to numerous mill levy overrides

and obligation bonds. Mill levy overrides are used to fund operating and capital expenses

where general obligation bonds are used to fund capital improvement projects - both are

funded by property taxes revenues and must be approved by the local community voters

(CDE Public School Finance Unit, 2014). Interestingly, in 2009, Colorado's House Bill

09-1318 was passed and school districts, where the local funding is deficient to fund the

total education program, "are no longer *guaranteed* the State-Share" (CDE Public School

Finance Unit, 2014, p. 8). Moreover, in the 2014-2015 school year, the "State-Share is

projected to provide $4,677.74 per pupil, or about 66.63% of the total program funding"

(p. 8) (see Appendix W).

Example. To illustrate the damage the State-Share can cause, assume the base amount of $6,121.00 and further assume the district you lead is not going to receive the estimated State-Share of $4,677.74. This reduces the per-pupil amount to $1,443.26 ($6,121.00 - $4,677.74). The estimated negative factor percentage for the 2014-2015 school year is 13.15%. (Colorado Department of Education, 2014, p. 6). Further damage can be caused by application of the negative factor. Using the remaining per-pupil amount of $1,443.26, multiplied by the negative factor percentage ($1,443.26 ×13.15%), the new per-pupil amount is $1,253.47 ($1,443.26 × 13.15% - ($1,443.26)). If you assume a student census of 500, your total operating revenue from the state is just under $627,000 as compared to the $2.6 million ($6,121.00 × 13.15% - ($6,121.00)) that it could be by reducing the base amount by only the negative factor percentage. Further, illustrating the damage of both the negative factor and the State-Share, a rural school with 500 hundred students without the application of the both reductions, would receive an amount just over three million dollars for the academic year.

Funding from the local community is an option for some rural schools but as Farmer (2009) points out, "rural districts have more limited abilities than urban districts to form financial partnerships with major corporations" (p. 29).These limitations are due to an absence of large organizations like those found in metropolitan areas. This is not to say large organizations found in non-rural contexts do not provide monies to rural areas for education, but those organizations located in small rural areas often have historical roots in local community and do not contribute significant financial resources.

This section illustrates the enduring challenges of education funding in Colorado and in particular, rural Colorado. As funding for education continues to decline and as rural populations increase, the need for a skilled rural school leader to navigate these and other challenges has become increasingly important. However, as reported earlier in this chapter, the number of enrollments in Colorado's school-leader licensure programs is also declining. To continue, what follows is a presentation and discussion of school leader preparation that covers role interest, role socialization, rural school leader preparation in Colorado, alternative licensure programs in Colorado, and the current Principal Quality Standards.

School Leader Preparation

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) published a report (2005) that focused on rural school leader preparation. The crux of this report, in part, contributes to the literature in this section. The IEL report (2005) states, the "rural school leaders must be prepared to do many things and the training programs must be multi-faceted" (p. 2). Results from this research discussed in a later chapter, confirm this statement, and reveals that it has and continues to be an issue for some rural school leaders.

This theme has deep roots in Colorado's history. Dating back to 1918, Professor C.G. Sargent discussed the need for rural schoolteachers and principals to have rural-specific preparation. He stated:

> There is a special demand for principals of rural schools, both men and women who have had training in rural work; men and women with a vision, who can become organizers and community leaders. Rural school improvement demands such as these. (p. 58)

A partnership between those both performing the role and those educating for the succession of that role is needed. This has been illustrated as an accomplishment in some urban contexts but seems to be overlooked in some rural contexts. In 2002, Hirsch and Groff reported:

> virtually all larger, urban districts have their recruitment programs and partnerships with principal preparation programs [and] only 10 percent of districts with fewer than 300 students and 6.3 percent of those serving 301 to 600 students have formal recruitment relationships with principal preparation programs. (p. 50)

Several years after the Hirsch and Groff (2002) study, the Donnell-Kay Foundation, as part of a three-part series, began the study of the Colorado principal leader pipeline. They have made several recommendations. To understand if their reach included Colorado's rural, a review of first report, *Meeting Colorado's Demand for Excellent Leaders* (Dolan, 2013) revealed the term *rural* being mentioned six (6) times, urban was mentioned twice, and suburban was not mentioned at all. In their second report, *Promising Leadership for School Turnarounds* (Dolan, 2014), rural is mentioned one time, urban is mentioned eight times, and suburban is mentioned three (3) times. The third report in the series has not yet been published.

In addition to their three-part research series, the Donnell-Kay Foundation launched another research effort called *Re-School*; towards the development of an educational structure that will, in part, increase learning opportunities for "rural families who are losing schools and learning opportunities due to population shifts" (2015, para. 4).

Figure 3. *Non-metro Population Change, 2010-2013*
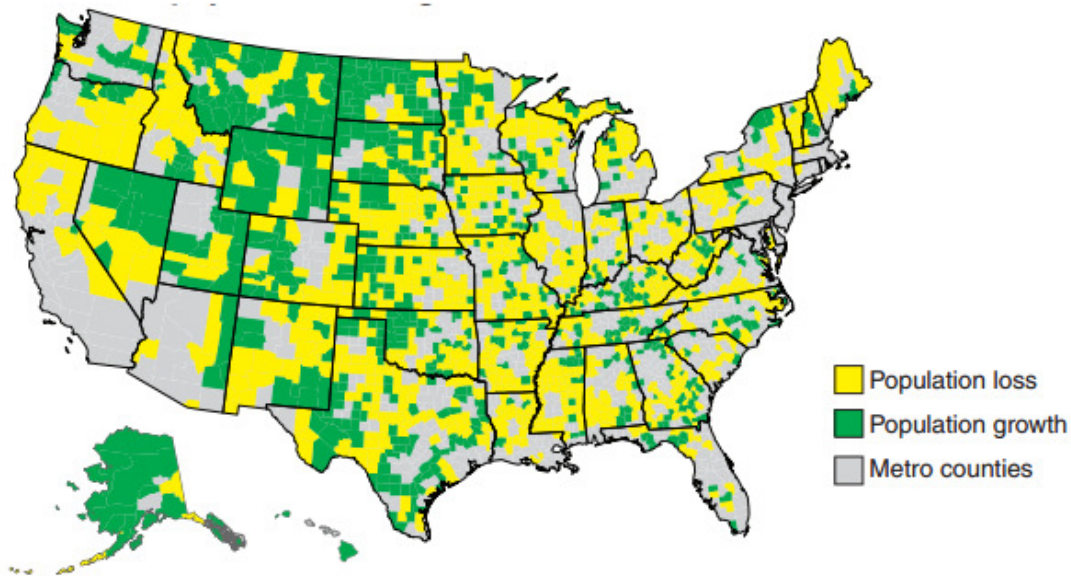
Source. Rural America At-A Glance, 2014 Edition.

According to Rural America At-A Glance (2014), population loss is occurring more around the central and eastern plains as compared to the mountain areas although population loss and growth is visible across the state. However, population growth appears to be greater in the mountain areas (see Figure 3 above). Given this illustration of population shift between 2010 and 2013, it is important to observe the Donnell-Kay Foundation's approach and attention towards the rural families they mention over an extended period. Regardless, the school leader pipeline in Colorado is dwindling and the effects on the future of the rural school is a growing concern.

Role Interest. Regardless of the rural school leader's succession planning strategies, a key factor in replacing the leader is to have someone who has an interest. Interest is affected by non-rural school leaders (i.e., rural and non-rural schoolteachers) witnessing the struggles the rural school leaders face on a day-to-day basis. Past and current literature, continues to suggest the plight of the rural school leader as being

overwhelming with excessive role demands and burnout and despite the continued

finding in and across our nation's rural areas, this problem persists. As noted by

researchers over a decade ago, "who wants to go into education and school leadership

when our policy makers are bashing education?" (Hirsch & Groff, 2002, p. 1).

The Colorado Department of Higher Education Legislative Educator Preparation

Report (2015) points out; there has been a 52.45% decline in the number of enrollments

in the administrator licensure programs since 2010. The lowest year being 2012 where

only 20 enrollments were recorded; a 67.21% decline from 2010 where 61 enrollments

were recorded. In line with this decline in administrator licensure, enrollments in

Colorado's principal preparation programs have also experienced a decline.. There has

been an 11.56% decline from 2010 to 2014; where 2013 reflected the lowest decline on

record for this period citing just slightly more than 760 enrollments, which is a 17.71%

decline from just over 925 enrollments recorded in 2010.

Role Socialization. As discussed earlier, being part of a role induction plan

increased the rural school leader's feelings of being prepared to assume their new role

and those who did not have the option, indicated their desire for it. Hirsch and Groff

(2002) reported, "less than two-thirds of districts provide mentors for new principals"

(Hirsch & Groff, 2002, p. X). The importance of role socialization in and among

Colorado's schools principals emerged in 2011 as part of research initiated by Teaching,

Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Colorado. They report the existence of

disparities across the state resulting in minimal-to-no support for new principal leaders.

Further review of the TELL Colorado 2013 and 2015 survey results were reviewed with no mention of this finding at the school leader level.

Butler (2008) cites "Daniel Ordaz, a former assistant superintendent and principal in the East Side Union High School District in San Jose, Calif." (p. 7), who is now a leader coach at New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, as saying:

> Principals need real-world help when they get the job. Administrative credentialing programs teach important theory…you get out on the job, and sometimes the practice and the theory don't meet. And, that's one of the problems we've had in the past. People go out on their own and don't have anyone to assist and guide them. (p. 7)

In a study of new rural school principals, "researchers found that nine of the ten new principals left their role within three years. Eight cited they have never been fully socialized into the organization as an educational leader" (Morford, 2002, p. 20; Ashton & Duncan, 2012, p. 20). The term *socialization* is defined by Hertting and Phenis-Bourke (2007) as "gaining familiarity with district and school-specific processes, responsibilities, and duties" (p. 299) or in less formal contexts, it is the way we go about getting things done in rural schools (Crow, 2006).

Recent research further supports the importance of role socialization by discussing the differences in theory to practice; "the clash between the practice of principal preparation and the related expectations for the actual practices of principals prefigures the ways in which the principal comes to understand her/his role" (Bristol, Brown, & Esnard, 2014, p. 28). Clarke and Stevens (2009) added to the notion of role socialization, suggesting, "people in a small community tend to be a little more

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conservative, it takes time for people to work out who you are and what you stand for and to decide whether or not they can trust you" (p. 287). A slightly different view, offered by Ashton and Duncan (2012), indicates role socialization to be with the community in addition to the school - a proficiency that needs developed, in general, as part of school leader development. Regarding rural school leaders and the differences between theory and practice, without knowledge or exposure to rural, these differences may only encourage new leaders to leave their role in pursuit of a role outside of rural or even outside of education.

Rural Leader Preparation – Colorado

According to the Donnell-Kay Foundation report (2013), "both CDE and DHE oversee and sanction 12 traditional preparation programs" (p. 6) in Colorado. Of the twelve, University of Colorado at Denver, University of Denver, University of Northern Colorado, and University of Phoenix "have the largest number of people enrolled in their principal preparation programs" (p. 6). To quantify this statement, just over 275 current and/or future school leaders completed a preparation program and under 15 completed an administrator program in the 2013-2014 academic year (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2015).

The twelve universities offer administrator and/or principal preparation education programs (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2013). Universities with either or both programs include Adams State University in Alamosa; Argosy University in Denver; Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction; Colorado State University in Fort Collins; Jones International University in Denver; University of Colorado in Colorado

Springs; University of Denver in Denver; University of Northern Colorado in Greeley; University of Phoenix in Denver; and Western State Colorado University in Gunnison. Adams State University and Western State Colorado University in Gunnison are located in areas classified as rural. No college or university is currently situated in an area classified as small rural. I did not review the neighboring state's colleges or universities or conduct an analysis of online education programs to determine if they support the administrator and/or principal preparation licensure requirements for Colorado.

Alternative Licensure. As it is another method for rural school leaders to earn principal licensure, a deeper look into this program had merit. In order to participate in an alternative licensure program, the applicant, according to CDE (2013), must: 1) complete a background check with a submission of their fingerprints to Colorado's Bureau of Investigation; 2) submit a statement of eligibility; and 3) hold a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university. Upon application approval, the newly designated principal program candidate receives a three-year statement of eligibility and can pursue employment in a participating Colorado school district. Once employment is secured, only then can the principal candidate enroll into one of the 11 state-approved alternative principal licensure programs.

According to CDE (2014), "any public school district may choose to employ an alternative principal candidate. It is the district and/or schools responsibility to create an individualized preparation program for each candidate and have that program approved by the Colorado Department of Education (para. 3), but the program is "required to provide instruction related to the Colorado Principal Performance Standards and the

Colorado Principal Quality Standards (para. 1). The costs associated with this state-approved program, based on the costs provided on seven of the individual agency web sites, range from $2,500 to just over $12,000. The remaining four agencies did not disclose their program costs or fees on their respective websites and I did not contact them for these details.

Of the 11 alternative licensure programs, only one is offered by a university; Western State Colorado University located in Gunnison, Colorado. The University of Denver's (DU), Morgridge College of Education, will begin offering a Mountain cohort for the 2015-2016 academic year (University of Denver, 2015). However, no information about the mountain cohort was available on the website as of May 31, 2015. A review and search of the word 'mountain' in the 2014-2015 Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) handbook and the Executive Leadership for Successful Schools (ELSS) 2014-2015 coursework plan revealed no difference in coursework options for rural and non-rural program participants. However, this absence of information may be due to timing of published academic material as the mountain cohort is scheduled to begin in the 2015-2016 school year. Those handbook's and coursework plans were not available on the DU program website and I did not contact the program director to obtain information. The DU website does state:

> The DU (Main) Campus cohort is open to applicants from any district or educational setting (private, charter, etc.) and applicants who are not currently working in an educational setting. The partnership cohorts (APS, DPS, Mountain, and TFA) are designed for applicants who work within those specific settings. (University of Denver, 2015, para. 2)

This statement suggests DU is taking steps towards the development of rural school leaders through the partnerships much like those within urban contexts.

Last, completion of the alternative principal licensure program can take as little as one year and be extended to three years, based on information retrieved from individual agency websites. To qualify for the initial principal license, CDE (2015) states the applicant must provide:

> (a) documented evidence of three or more years of full-time successful experience as a licensed or certified professional in a public or non-public elementary or secondary school in this state or another state; and (b) demonstrated professional competencies as evidenced by passing scores on the Colorado PLACE Principal Exam (#80). (Colorado Department of Education, 2015, para. 1)

Preparation and funding aside, there are other factors that need to be considered according to some researchers. Therefore, what follows is a discussion of some of these factors.

High Performing High Needs (HPHN) Schools

Barley and Beesley (2007) conducted an exploratory study based on three determining factors of twenty high-performing, high-needs (HPHN) rural schools across Wyoming, Missouri, and Colorado. The purpose of the study was to identify common key success factors between these rural schools. Results from the study yielded the following themes:

> (a) close knit and mutually supportive relationship with the community; (b) high teacher retention; (c) expectations for all students to work hard and to

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perform to the best of their ability; (d) administrative leadership; (e) principals actively monitored the teachers in the classrooms to ensure appropriate behavior; (f) use of student data; (g) parental involvement; (h) structure of the school to support achievement; (i) extracurricular activities; and (j) a culture of caring. (Barley and Beesley, 2007, p. 9)

According to the researchers, these aforementioned themes are considered ideal and key contributors to the success of rural schools. In thinking about these themes, the research study structure, its results, and its applicability to other rural schools, several questions immediately come to mind. In my review of the interview protocol and subsequent research summary and results, I identified what I feel to be a number of significant limitations that I consider necessary to discuss. It is noted that a study limitations section was not included in this particular research study for phases either one or two. The items that I feel are limitations and warrant disclosure and discussion within this literature review are, length of the qualitative interview – one twenty minute telephone call per principal, the opening interview statement to the study principals being interviewed, and the guiding content of the interview questions and overall interview protocol.

In the opening interview statement by the researcher, the studies principals were told explicitly their school had been identified as a "successful rural school in terms of student achievement" (Barley & Beesley, 2007, p. 12) but not told their success classification was determined by the researchers. The researchers did indicate the interview protocol questions were open-ended, but the protocol construct clearly assumes the rural principal also viewed their school as high performing. In phase two of the research, principals for six of the twenty schools were advised how they were identified

as successful against their counterparts within their home state. Further, it is important to note these six schools were not randomly selected. Their school's inclusion into phase two of the research was intentional and solely based on the type of responses offered by the principals to the guided interview questions in phase one.

In comparison, a similar study was conducted in Kentucky in 2005 and the rural schools were selected based on six determining factors and the study schools were compared against schools deemed low performing; this was not a factor for consideration in the Barley and Beesley study. Research, led by Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005), identified seven common characteristics of HPHN schools and three of the characteristics aligned with Barley and Beesley's 2007 study. The common characteristics between the two studies were relationships; defined commonly and broadly by a caring and nurturing environment, the high level of student performance expectations, and leadership.

The Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005) study yielded the following success characteristics among their eight HPHN study schools: (a) high expectations; (b) relationships; (c) academic, instructional focus; (d) student assessment; (e) leadership and decision-making; (f) faculty work ethic and morale, and (g) teacher recruitment, hiring, and assignment (p. 3). Moreover, the 2005 study yielded little difference in leadership between the high and low performing (LP) schools and the use of technology was considered less than effective. Whereas the HPHN school-selection parameters were not well aligned between the two studies, a number of similar HPHN success characteristics emerged.

In a third study, Cooper, Ponder, Merritt and Matthews (2005) researched eleven high performing (HP) schools across North Carolina. These researchers did not limit the location of their study to schools in areas Census Bureau's Geographic Areas Reference Manual (1994) classified as rural. The purpose for including this research is the overarching themes identified as part of the HP schools. The primary theme for school success in North Carolina, according to this study is "relationship and connections – success is seen as comprehensive and is based on caring relationships among family members and students" (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt and Matthews, 2005, p. 7). The remaining themes identified in the Cooper, et al. (2005) study were identified and classified as: (a) "safety nets and family feeling" (p. 9); (b) "data-directed dialogue and collaborative instruction" (p. 11); (c) "departments as drivers" (p.14); and (d) "collaborative leadership" (p. 16).

While there are a number of themes threaded throughout these research results, leadership is one that is prominent and recurring. The reasons for leadership being so prominent could be connected to the increased attention to leadership responsibilities within the last few years, increased accountability pressures linked to federal, state, and local governance, it could be due to the efforts of the rural school leader fostering strong relationships within the larger rural community, or it could be a combination of these three plausible reasons. Ultimately, the recurring theme suggests an importance in leadership that should not be overlooked.

Rural Charter Schools

There is growing evidence to suggest charter schools are not favored in rural communities – evidence of this notion surfaced in the results of this study as well. Interestingly, rural charter schools have similar issues as that of non-chartered rural schools. Smarick (2014) reported education funding and faculty recruitment and retention to be among these issues. The focus of his study was to explore and examine policy across five states, Colorado being one. A critique that periodically surfaces in rural research is the researcher's description of rural. This description is often isolated to a single geographic paradigm that I discussed early in chapter two and Smarcik's (2014) explanation of rural was no different.

A statement made by Smarick (2014) discussed a significant challenge of the charter school within the rural community. He stated:

> Rural communities are often tightly knit; the local school woven into that fabric. If unfamiliar with a community's history and character and unresponsive to its needs and concerns, a charter school could begin to fray that fabric. Policymakers should be mindful of such issue. (p. 9)

A challenge to this notion is the connection of the rural school leader, as an established member of the community, to the charter school performance. In some rural areas, charter schools have been successful as Smarick (2014) reports: "the charter school has outperformed the local district and state proficiency average for the past three years in reading and for two of the past three years in math" (p. 8). The reasons for this success were not identified in Smarcik's report.

Principal Quality Standards – Colorado

      The importance of educational leadership gained national attention and was reified with the 2008 publication of Educational Leadership and Policy Standards – supported by the Wallace Foundation and adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Prior to the 2008 publication, the ISLLC standards, first published in 1996, were reported as being "too restrictive" (p. 5). Moreover, the modified ISLLC (2008) standards were designed, in part, as it was suggested by The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) the 1996 ISLLC standards "froze leadership preparation programs" (p. 5). Differences between the 1996 and 2008 standards were identified as: 1) "language and framework; 2) elimination of indicators; and 3) functions that define the standards replace knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (p. 6). The previous standards listed six areas, much like the 2008 standards and 183 sub-areas, which were collapsed into a set of 31 functions to be measured through leader performance observation.

      According to the ISLLC (2008) report, these more strategic educational leadership policy standards were developed to provide a set of "high-level guidance and insight about the traits, functions of work, and responsibilities expected of school and district leaders" (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 5) and were written in a manner to be less authoritarian and to provide a model for individual states to use as they either develop new or update their existing standards. Improving school leadership, according to the ISLLC (2008) standards, relies on educational leaders to consider each of the following:

Setting a widely shared vision for learning; developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, mobilizing community resources; acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and understanding, responding to, and influencing political, social, legal, and cultural contexts. (p. 16)

Review of the 2008 ISLLC standards against the backdrop of rural schools, appears to suggest a comprehensive approach whereby the rural school leader's relationship with the community, the school's social and cultural contexts, and collaboration with neighboring rural school principals is implied. The connection between each of the standards (ISLLC, 2008) and the rural principal school leader gives way to individual transactional measurement and analysis. As an example, the rural school leader's relationship with the rural community could be measured and analyzed at an individual transaction level in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the scope of this dynamic relationship and further, how the rural school leader responds to and performs in the rural community culture; "understanding the politics and culture of a rural school and community is important. News travels quickly in rural areas and community networks can be invasive" (Duncan & Stock, 2010, p. 294). Rural school leader responses and performance may relegate agentive empowerment to the rural community thus influencing the community's perception of the principal's effectiveness. The response alone however, may lend itself to further problems without considering how to respond in a manner that retains the principal leader's integrity while furthering change in the name of progress.

Conceptual Framework

In the previous section, I examined and discussed relevant literature linked to education funding, rural school leaders, along with some of their transactions with socioecological factors that according to researchers Brown, Jeanes, and Cutter-Mackenzie (2014), "considers connections, relationships and consequences that are not often given importance in traditional approaches to education" (p. 26). These socioecological factors entrenched within the Social Ecology as Education (Brown, Jeanes, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014) conceptual framework, are 1) "lived experience; 2) place; 3) experiential pedagogies; and 4) agency and participation" (p. 27).

The purpose for using this framework is that rural is described as being socially constructed and its relevant ecologies refers to the "immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and dynamic cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact" (Barnett & Casper, 2001, p. 465). The tenets of the chosen conceptual framework, as they relate to a socially constructed rural, gives space in which to explore and examine the research findings. Therefore, relative to the framework, this study is designed to capture and privilege the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders towards a new or perhaps evolved ontological approach to current and/or future rural school leader preparation that is epistemologically informed.

This conceptual framework, in its current state, offers flexibility with which to consider rural research but is unsuccessful in recognizing space as having a relationship to place within the rural context. To expound on this notion, I examined and discuss the relationships between place and space within a rural context to support the adaptation of

the original model to one that is more dialectic to rural in its approach. However, this dialectic approach is not isolated to just the places and spaces discussion; it also serves as a guiding approach to this study.

A dialectic approach, as suggested by Merrifield (1993), is a "method of organizing the world for the purpose of study and presentation" (p. 517). In this chapter, I define the term *world* as the literature linked by an emphasis to rural school leaders and therefore is dialectically organized to study and cohesively present the information in a manner that draws to the surface, gaps within the literature. However, in chapter 7, the world evolves to be the emergent findings from this research study and through the conceptual framework; I organize the findings to draw meaning to further recognize implications.

The links between and within the literature, connects the individualized and often focused research topics through attention to their relationships. Merrifield (1993) emphasizes the impossibility of completely understanding the many parts that comprise the whole without acknowledging and understanding the relationships that exist between each of those parts. This approach supports the initial rationale for the use of Social Ecology as Education conceptual framework (Brown, Jeanes, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014) to review and discuss the literature.

Missing from the conceptual framework is the idea of space and its relational connection to place. Merrifield (1993) cites: "space and place have a real ontological status since they are both embodied in material processes – namely, real human activities [and] their distinction must therefore, be conceived by capturing how they melt into each

other" (p. 520). While interrogating the literature on place, I layer in the concept of space in support of an adapted conceptual framework; adding another dimension through which the existing literature on rural school principal leaders may be understood.

Place and Space

As argued by Agnew (2011) the notion of "space and place are about the 'where' of things" (p. 1) and the philosophical underpinnings of these two concepts have been the center of an enduring conflict. Azano (2011) leans into space and place reporting, "Our sense of place could be the many spaces (e.g., childhood neighborhood, college town, first adult home) with which we identify" (p. 4). For that reason, what follows is a discussion of the concepts of place and space against the rural milieu to elucidate the importance of each which later leads into support behind modification of the selected conceptual framework.

Place

Grunewald (2010) suggests, "Our cultural experience is 'placed' in the 'geography' of our everyday lives and in the 'ecology' of the diverse relationships that take place within and between places" (p. 137). Ecology from a social position, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2014), is "the study of the relationships between people, social groups, and their environment" (p. 1). Applying this definition to the rural school and community, the relationships that take place exists between the rural schools as a community, the rural community itself, and those who interact within and between those places. The definition and concept of 'place' can be complex and often

difficult to understand, thus "in the simplest sense, 'place' refers to either a location somewhere or to the occupation of that location" (Agnew, 2011, p. 6).

As one of the four tenets within the Social Ecology as Education conceptual framework, "place is essential to education because it provides researchers and practitioners with a concrete focus for cultural study" (Gruenewald, 2010, p. 143) and within rural, "placed-based advocates contend that rural students are deeply tied to locality by sense of place" (Azano, 2011, p. 1). Further, 'place' is described by Hutchison (2004) as a constructed reality "informed by the unique experiences, histories, motives, and goals that each of us brings to the spaces with which we identify" (p. 11) and as rural students are profoundly connected to their communities, authors posit the idea that place-based education seeks to ground learning in "local phenomena and students' lived experience" (Smith, 2002, p. 586).

This sense of learning as grounded in the rural locale not only takes place in the classrooms within rural school but also as Gruenewald (2010) asserts, within and between the "culturally and ecologically rich contexts of community life" (p. 149). This approach aligns with the importance of community and culture inside multiple rural contexts as discussed in chapter two, but moreover, place is revealed as an essential dimension with which to understand how community and culture are developed and sustained.

Space

The discussion of 'space,' draws upon Cloke and Park's (1984) reference to space as not only one of social representation but also one of locality; referring to a particular

place or area. In opposition to Cloke and Park, Halfacree (2006) asserts 'space' is far

more complex than social representation and locality definitions and requires the

development and engagement of 'space' as model which can be applied across all rural

areas regardless of its diverse construct.

Space as a model, as suggested by Halfacree, draws upon the works of Henri

Lefebvre (1974), a French Marxist sociologist who expanded the scope of Marxist theory

through his research of 'space' and spatial theory. Halfacree (2006) purports Lefebvre's

"relative neglect of the rural within his [space] work shows the universality of the

production of a particular kind of space – urban and rural – under capitalism, and from

his dialectic attempt to resist binaries or dualisms" (p. 49). Halfacree's interpretation of

Lefebvre's material representation of 'space', results in the suggested "three-fold model

of space" (p. 50):

> First, there are spatial practices (rural locality); defined as actions-flows, transfers,
> interactions – that 'secrete' a particular society's space, facilitating both material
> expression of permanence's and societal reproduction. Second, there are
> representations of space. These are formal conceptions of space, as articulated by
> capitalists, developers, planners, scientists, and academics. Third, there are spaces
> of representation. These diverse and often incoherent images and symbols are
> associated with the tumults and passions of space as directly lived. (pp. 50-51)

In considering *term* rural and the contexts that inform it against space as a model,

all three factors of the model, encompass rural and as Halfacree (2006) asserts, "this

three-fold architecture for rural space is less about establishing a new understanding than

about realizing what we already have" (p. 51). Moreover, Halfacree (2006) cautions

against an unquestionable adoption of the model suggesting the isolation and analysis of

any of the three factors within the ecology of [rural] spaces may create a sense of "contradiction and instability" (p. 50).

Connecting space as a model with rural education however, is not as seemingly complex. Soja (1996) who also draws upon Lefebvre's works on space, created the idea of Thirdspace; "an invitation to think beyond oppositional binaries and in different ways about space and spatiality" (Soja, 1996, p. 192). Halsey (2006) draws in the works of Lefebvre (1974) and Soja (1996) by suggesting the development of a

> spatial map intended as a conceptual tool for teachers to help them locate, monitor, and continuously adjust their relationship dynamics in a rural or remote context, so they can optimize their effectiveness in terms of pedagogy, contribute towards building social capital, and gain a sense of personal satisfaction form living and working in a country location. (p. 492)

The purpose and concept of Halsey's (2006) spatial map coupled with multiple rural contexts and viewed through a critical social ecology as education conceptual framework, acts as a socio-cultural compass. As an example, a new school leader, who received formal education and training from a non-rural tailored principal preparation program, accepts a role within a rural school district. This new school leader, who may be unfamiliar with the dynamics of rural places and spaces, may use this socio-cultural compass concept to observe, measure, and calibrate their own lived experience, agency, and participation against the multiple rural contexts and within rural schools and communities for which they serve.

Place and space, through review of the literature, can be said to intersect at points in social representation, ecology, locality, and culture. As Merrifield (1993) suggested through his discussion, place and space interact to create another dimension with which

to understand the how humans interact with and within their environment. However, the original framework illustration does not reflect an interactive or relationship depiction. As a result, the original conceptual framework has been adapted to reflect a nested relationship and place now includes a relationship with space, as illustrated in Figure 4.1 The remaining socio-ecological factors representing the revised conceptual framework, is separately defined, and discussed in detail within this chapter.

Original Conceptual Framework
Figure 4. *Social Ecology as Education*

Modified Conceptual Framework
Figure 4.1. *Social Ecology as Education*
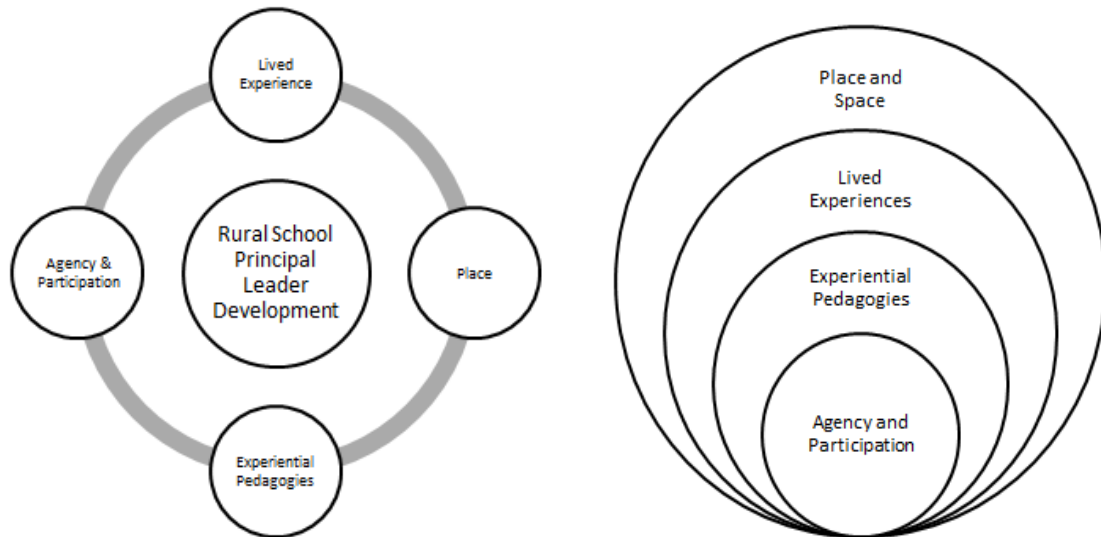
Figure 4.1. Adapted from Brown, Jeanes, and Cutter-Mackenzie (2014) Social Ecology as Education Conceptual Framework as seen in Figure 4.

Use of place and space in this research will also include Gieryn's (2000) multi-dimensional approach, whereby "place is a space filled up by people, practices objects, and representations, and should not confused with the use of geographic or cartographic metaphors" (p. 465). This approach to place and space within the context of rural is well

attended to as the *term* rural, as previously discussed, departs from a single geographic paradigm to one that considers the multiple dimensions as suggested by Gieryn's (2000).

In rural, the use of Gieryn's (2000) approach to place and space is operationalized as a contextualized function of the rural school and the rural community as both can be considered place and space not subject to or limited by definitional boundaries. Boundless, the opportunity for social transformation exists within the rural school and rural community but remains eclipsed by historical cultural narratives that continue to persist. To better understand this epistemological underpinning, I explored the role of the rural school, the rural school culture and the rural community within the Agency and Participation section of this chapter.

Lived Experiences

The definition of lived experience "is a representation and understanding of choices and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge" (Boylorn, 2008, p. 1) and is "highly personal and subjective" (Brown, Jeanes, Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014, p. 28). Rural school leaders who may not have prior exposure to rural may be faced with how to make meaning of the knowledge they acquire about and within their rural environment. The rural school leader's ability to make meaning is rooted in their "social, cultural, and historical background" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 29) and if their exposure to rural has been limited or non-existent, meaning making may be restricted to only those experiences to which they most identify giving way to opportunity for knowledge contradiction and/or rejection (Ryan & Rossi, 2008).

Meaning making within the lived experience element takes into consideration the contextual influences of past experiences guided by reflection and the places and spaces in which they occurred. These experiences, as I discuss in relation to the subject of collaborative leadership, have agentive components that connect experiential pedagogies to agency and participation elements. Thus, the socioecological elements connected to the lived experiences also seem to be heavily influenced by them. In relation to the purpose of this research study, connecting the lived experiences of experienced rural school leaders to the relationships inherent within their decision-making patterns to understand the '*why*' behind their decisions is a key element towards identifying rural school leader development characteristics.

Experiential Pedagogies

Drawing on the works of Dewey (1938/1998), Joplin (1981, 2008), and Kolb (1984), Brown, Jeanes, and Cutter-Mackenzie (2014) identified a set of socioecological philosophies in which experiential pedagogies can be understood. The first is recognizing experiences are constant simplified as "past experiences are always connected to future experiences" (p. 35), the second, being "the importance of the teacher understanding the lived experiences, spaces and places of the classrooms" (p. 35), and third "experience and reflection are integrally linked and educators need to both craft rich experiences and foster a deep examination of how the experiences are reflected upon" (p. 36). In order to connect the past to the present to better understand the purpose of this research study, this section illustrates the evolution of the school leader role, leader preparation programs, and leadership development standards.

Agency and Participation

Agency, according to Biesta and Tedder (2006), has been understood as "an educational aim, an educational ideal and as the desired outcome of educational processes" (p. 5). Translated to a socioecological definition, agency marks a person's "capacity to act independently and make free choices" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 38). Agency, as suggested by a number of researchers: 1) can be accomplished through involvement with agency; a person's response toward an environment as opposed to their response within the environment; 2) has inherent limitations based on policy contexts; and 3) is often subject to a person's resource availability embedded within sociocultural environments (Brown, Jeanes, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014; Thomas, 2007; Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Costall, 2000). Environment, for the purposes of this research, focuses on the socioecological contexts associated to the role of the rural school, rural school culture, the rural community all having implications on the role of the rural school leader.

As an example, consider a rural school leader who earned his or her education from a non-rural, place-responsive preparation program or one who has no exposure to a formal principal preparation education. Their agency may be inadequate within their rural context and further may create circumstances for which they may be or perceive to be disempowered. Brown et al. (2014) suggests, "education needs to be ongoing, and relate specifically to the setting and community environment in which the individual is located" (p. 40). This environment-specific education prepares individuals like rural school principal leaders: 1) with the essential "tools to gain agentive capacity" (p. 40) by acknowledging and educating for the multiple socioecological dimensions to increase

empowerment; and 2) to achieve an idealized outcome whereby those with agency

actively take part in making critical decisions (Brown et al., 2014; Thomas, 2007).

Chapter Summary

This chapter was arranged into three distinct sections. The initial segment

explored the extant literature on the role of the rural school, rural school community

culture, rural community culture, history, and evolution of the rural school leader role,

along with discussion of the instructional and transformational leadership styles. The

purpose of this introductory section, in part, was to bridge the descriptions of rural from

the previous chapter to the discussions of the rural in this chapter as a means to frame the

review and discussion of the literature.

Further, I examined and discussed relevant literature linked to education funding,

rural school leaders, along with some of their transactions with socioecological factors

that according to researchers Brown, Jeanes, and Cutter-Mackenzie (2014), "considers

connections, relationships and consequences that are not often given importance in

traditional approaches to education" (p. 26). These socioecological factors entrenched

within the Social Ecology as Education (Brown, Jeanes, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014)

conceptual framework, are 1) "lived experience; 2) place; 3) experiential pedagogies; and

4) agency and participation" (p. 27). The purpose for using this framework as a means to

inform the research is supported by the term *rural* being described as socially constructed

and its relevant ecologies refers to the "immediate physical surroundings, social

relationships, and dynamic cultural milieus within which defined groups of people

function and interact" (Barnett & Casper, 2001, p. 465). Thus, the tenets of this particular

conceptual framework, as they relate to a socially constructed rural, gives space in which to explore, examine, and discuss the research findings along with implications for policy, research, and practice. How this conceptual framework informs these implications is further discussed as part of the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH METHOD

A convergent parallel mixed-method design; whereby qualitative and quantitative data strands were implemented concomitantly and where both strands were equally weighted (Creswell, 2008; 2007) was used to reveal Colorado's rural school leader experiences. One primary research question emerged after the conclusion of more than a year-long, expansive literature review of the (a) multiple descriptions, contexts, and definitions of the term *rural*; (b) historical contexts and the evolutionary trajectories of the rural and non-rural school leader roles dating back to 1900, both nationally and in Colorado; (c) multiple roles of the rural school and purpose of rural schooling; (d) rural community; (e) rural school community's influence on cultural development and cultural persistence; and (f) rural school leader purpose and role development. The emergent question guiding this exploration is:

- How can the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders inform the evolution of principal preparation programs?

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of existing Colorado rural school leaders with the objective of explicating factors embedded within their lived experiences towards understanding how the continued decline in both the availability of education funding and availability of well-prepared leaders for rural schools, effects the rural school leader role.

This research study is not an evaluation of Colorado's existing principal and/or superintendent/administrative preparation programs offered through a number of colleges and universities, nor is it a comparison of the rural school leader's lived experiences against Colorado's Principal Quality Standards (Colorado Department of Education, 2011). Whereas I acknowledge both elements as important factors in Colorado's school leader preparation, my decision to exclude the evaluation and comparison of these factors from this research is exclusively based on a predetermined research scope.

Last, readers of this research should not correlate or infer my exclusion of these factors as an implication of negative opinion or a level of disregard towards the value proposition of these factors within role preparation. Moreover, this exclusion should not devalue these factors within the readers' perceptions or position(s) regarding school leader development.

Role of the Researcher

Supported with and by relevant literature, I end this chapter with my understanding of rural; an understanding grounded in my own lived experiences that further informs my biases, assumptions, and general social and cultural positionality. The role of the researcher within qualitative research according to Saldaña (2011) Stake (2010), Creswell (2008; 2007), and Seidman (2006), serves as the primary data collection instrument regardless of the researcher's use of research procedures. Creswell (2008) further suggested the role of the qualitative researcher is influenced by "strategic, ethical and personal issues" (p. 177) due to the researcher's being "typically involved in a

sustained and intensive experience with participants" (Creswell, 2008, p. 177). Saldaña

(2011) explicitly stated:

> Your autobiography and identity – life experiences, knowledge, training, emotions, values, attitudes, beliefs, gender, ethnicity, and so forth – influence and affect the relationship between you and your participants and the analysis of your data. Who you are (or are becoming) determines to a large extent what and how you research. (p. 22)

In response to the researcher's influence (Saldaña, 2011; Creswell, 2008; 2007)

within the elements of quantitative and qualitative research, I have an obligation, as the

researcher, to provide the reader with a description of my identity, experiences, and

biases, when and where appropriate.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

According to Chiseri-Strater (1996), "all researchers are positioned whether they

write about it or not" (p. 115). Accepting this notion, my positionality is placed within the

boundaries of my fixed demographic and cultural ascriptions (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; St.

Louis & Calabrese-Barton, 2002). However, external to these fixed boundaries as

Rosaldo (1989) and Chiseri-Strater (1996) have asserted, a researcher's position is

subjective to the depth and breadth of his or her lived experiences.

These factors combined situate the researcher-informant relationship within

contextualized boundaries that strengthen the connection. In doing so, the researcher-

informant relationship becomes more transparent and offers the informant an opportunity

to view the researcher from an equal and knowing position as compared to a position of

power. To illustrate this point, significant parts of my lived experiences are grounded in a

mid-western rural context. Therefore, in order to attempt the construction of a near-

immediate rapport with the potential informants early in the email communication, I disclosed my rural history, my age, my educational history and my intentions behind earning my doctorate, as well as a link to my professional social profile whereby the potential research informant could visually connect with me.

Research, co-located in place, fixed demographics, and cultural ascriptions, is not without power - power over the researcher, the informant, and the position the researcher takes when performing the data analysis and interpretation (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Hooks, 1984; Maher & Tetreault, 1994). This multi-directional power dynamic forces the researcher to examine "the self as a result of the study of the other" (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 119) whereby the self and the other become, in part, objectives of the research. In doing so, this deters "us from removing ourselves from our research process, from our connections with our informants, or from our written translation of our data to text" (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 119) further honoring the placed position, the other and the self. Evidence of my established researcher-informant rapport, along with the deep emotional struggle I endured towards the forced re-emergence of my forgotten rural identity.

Researcher Biases

An overt researcher limitation of this research study is researcher bias. According to Stake (2010), researchers often select their own places to research. In support of Stake, my rural upbringing, background, education, and lived experiences offered both the opportunity for strength as well as limitation; described as biases within the scope of this research study. One of the ways to reduce the risk of researcher bias is to ask participants "questions that are open-ended" (Penwarden, 2013, para. 8) and provide participants with

the opportunity to comment on their qualitative responses also known as memoing or journaling (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2007). As such, this was the approach used throughout the completion of this study.

Researcher Understanding of Rural

As the primary investigator of this research, it is important to present my understanding of rural, recognizing, acknowledging, and considering my biases towards and against the term and contexts – all rooted in my own lived rural experiences. Reflecting on the term and descriptions of rural and what it means to me now, as an adult, gives way to an alternative set of beliefs and values that I now hold as compared to those formed during my youth. Much as the literature has suggested, I failed to see the value in rural and wanted nothing more than to relocate to a non-rural setting where I viewed educational and financial opportunity to be plentiful.

My relocation to non-rural settings has proven beneficial educationally, professionally, and financially. However, through this educational journey, I was introduced to a new meaning of rural and my research interests were re-focused. During my time in numerous rural places and spaces, I witnessed and was part of the embedded connections between the value system of my family, the rural community where I grew up, and schools I attended. These connections were and continue to remain well steeped in my family's traditions, values, and norms. When these factors were combined with my rural community's historical narratives, the rural that I know offered me a sense of belonging which later inspired and formed, in part, the construct of my identity.

Last, my personal understanding of rural has evolved to one that: 1) recognizes, acknowledges, and values the complex historical narratives guiding the evolution of the term rural within multiple contexts; 2) considers rural as an identity by which many self-identify, find comfort, and a sense of belonging within that identity; and 3) has a social and cultural construct informing my own, now unapologetic and emotional re-connection to rural.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Philosophical Framework</h2>

Pragmatism, as a philosophical framework and complement to mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2008; 2007), underpinned the exploratory motive of this research study. Creswell (2008; 2007), suggested pragmatist-guided "researchers look to the 'what' and 'how' to research based on its intended consequences" (p. 23) by de-emphasizing the "focus on the methods" (p. 22) and more directly "emphasiz[ing] the research problem and use [of] all approaches available to understand the problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 22) and the positionality of the researcher.

Engaging a pragmatic approach, the defined research question which directly aligns to the 'how' as discussed by Creswell (2008; 2007) and the 'what' part of the question, though not explicitly stated as a sub-question/questions, underpins this approach. The research procedures, while attending to the importance of the design principles and boundaries, were designed considering an epistemological framework rooted in an expansive scope with which to learn more about the phenomenon being studied.

To briefly illustrate this notion, the organization of the four surveys by topic, the inclusion of numerous boundary-free comment options within each of the surveys, and the use of semi-structured research questions during the interview process, all fit the pragmatist approach by offering the participants numerous opportunities to express and discuss what is of interest and what has value to them as individuals. The ontological objective underpinning this research study provided for the development of a set of principles with which the researcher and reader can measure the significance of this research, where the value is individually defined and measured (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Therefore, attention to the problem underpinning the research study, using a pragmatist's philosophical framework as an integral part of the research design process, is of greater possibility. This spectrum of possibility, can be measured in terms of value, based on the intentional and well-attended research design in order to (a) extract meaning, (b) apply that meaning as a basis towards learning more about a research problem, (c) follow the application of meaning with the opportunity towards the conceivable development of problem-solving solution(s), and (d) do so in a way that constructs a positive outcome.

Research Design

Method

A convergent parallel mixed-method design; whereby qualitative and quantitative data strands were implemented concomitantly and where both strands were equally weighted (Creswell, 2008; 2007).Through data collection and analysis, the practical use

underpinning this research design is to serve as a vehicle to convert, codify, and convey emergent explicit knowledge to others as a means to enhance or transform their tacit knowledge of the research phenomenon.

Creswell (2008) states, the primary supposition of a mixed methods research design "provides a better understanding of the research problem that either form of data alone (p. 2). In doing so, the objective of this design is to engage a deeper socio-ecological awareness of the phenomenon being studied. As suggested by Newton (2003) and engaging this deeper awareness, "allows the researcher to develop a greater depth of tacit knowledge" (Newton, 2003, p. 9). The term t*acit knowledge*, according to Polanyi (1958), acquired through lived experiences, cannot simply be transferred through conventional means. Ultimately, the primary reason for using a mixed method design, as Bryman (2006) suggests and defines as illustration, "refers to the use of the qualitative data to illustrate quantitative findings" (p. 63).

Convergent Parallel Design

Quantitative data were collected using four subject-based surveys. These surveys were intentionally structured to collect nominal data to inform the primary research question guiding this study. Concurrent to the quantitative data collection phase qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews towards gaining clarity in answering the research question on lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders. Figure 4 is a representation of the design as it was applied to this research study.

Figure 4. *Mixed-Methods – Convergent Parallel Design*
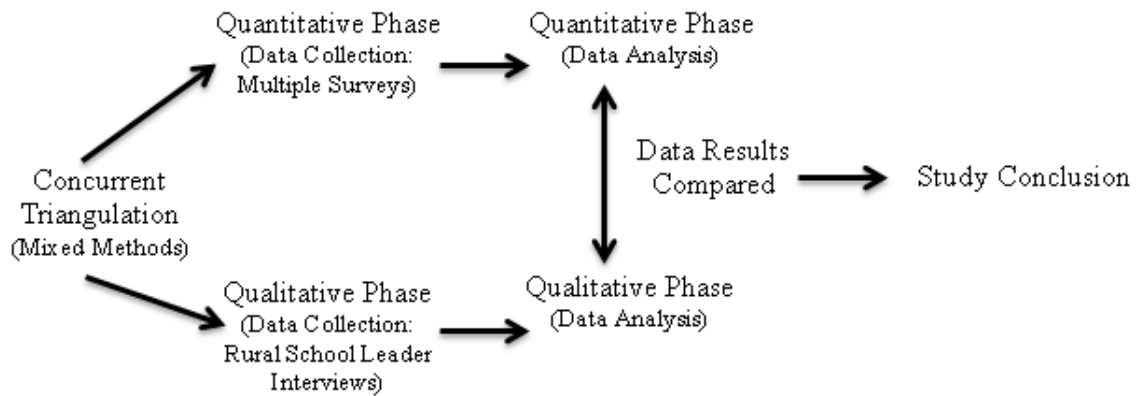
Figure 4. Mixed methods, concurrent data triangulation design. Adapted from Research Design: *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* by J. W. Creswell, 2008, p. 210. Copyright 2009 by SAGE Publications.

Benefits of using this design, according to Creswell (2008) and Bryman (2012) include its efficiency, the opportunity for the reader, regarding the research study, to gain a greater sense of "confidence in its authenticity" (Seidman, 2006, p. 26), and "to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic" (Creswell, 2008, p. 77). Moreover, it was used to obtain distinctive but parallel collections of data on an identical topic in an effort to be more informed about the problem underpinning this research.

Further, as a contribution towards an increased level of research design validity, Creswell (2008) stated: the [concurrent data triangulation] "model [is used] as a means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other (or conversely, the strength of one adds to the strength of the other)" (p. 213). Some of the challenges that exist with this design include the increased level of effort to carry out the design, possible challenges that may emerge as a result of collecting both the qualitative and quantitative strands simultaneously, and combining the data when the results may not agree (Bryman 2012; Creswell, 2008; 2007).

Time and place. Quantitative and qualitative data collection activities, also known as mixed methods (Creswell, 2008; 2007), occurred from late May 2014 through the end of August 2014. Place is geographically limited to all rural areas of Colorado where the definition of rural was formally ratified by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in on January 28, 2013 (see Appendix J).

Rural school leader role description. The term *rural school leader*, for the purposes of this research study, is described as any person who is currently serving or who has previously served in a leadership role within a Colorado rural school and where that person's role titles could include, but not be limited to (a) principal; (b) director; (c) head of school; (d) superintendent and principal; or (e) superintendent, principal, and teacher. The purpose of this expansive scope was to present an inclusive opportunity where the voices of all rural school leaders in traditional and non-traditional roles could be represented through participation in this research study.

Future rural school leader role description. The description of Colorado's *future rural school leader* is not limited by geographic region and could include existing school leaders or school leader aspirants who may or may not have rural exposure, rural experience, or rural school leader preparation. The purpose for not limiting the future rural school leader description is to ensure non-Colorado residing readers of this research, who may be considering or who may already be progressing towards a future in Colorado rural school leadership, have an opportunity towards greater awareness of the roles, responsibilities, and lived experiences facing Colorado's rural school leaders.

School type and role experience descriptions. There were no limitations placed on school type, thus participants in this study extended across multiple school types, including elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, alternative or opportunity schools, charter schools, and schools that focused on early childhood education. There were no limitations placed on the length of time a rural school leader had served in his or her role. Thus, the years of experience for this research study, based on the collected and aggregated quantitative survey data, ranged from just over one year to 10 years or more, whereas years of experience, based on collected and aggregated qualitative data shared by the participants during their interviews, ranged from just over one year to just over six years.

Participant Population, Human Subject Protection, and Ethical Considerations

In October 2014, The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) reported 178 school districts in Colorado. Of the 178, 104 or 58.43% are classified as small rural districts and 44 or 24.72% are classified as rural areas (see Appendix I). CDE further reported, "Over 150,000 students [exist] in rural districts" (p. 1) which equates to "20 percent of the total student population in the state" (p.1). There is no change from what was previously reported by the CDE in May 2014. On January 28, 2013, the Colorado Rural Education Council (REC), formed in 2011, revised the rural school district definition (see Appendix J) as follows:

> A Colorado school district is determined to be rural based on the size of the district, the distance from the nearest large urban/suburbanized area, and having a student enrollment of approximately 6,500 students or fewer. Small rural districts are those districts meeting these same criteria and having a student population of fewer than 1,000 students. (Colorado Department of Education, 2013, p.1)

Colorado Rural School Leaders

A list of Colorado's school leaders was obtained with permission from the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department at the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education. This school leader list contained the school code; school name; district; mailing address and zip code; telephone number; the principal's first middle and last name, and the principal's email address. Missing from the list was the rural classification. Therefore, in order to determine which school districts were classified as rural, I obtained the January 23, 2013 (revised December 13, 2013) list of school districts in Colorado and their rural classification made available on the Colorado Department of Education Rural Education Council (2014) website.

Once all the necessary lists were obtained, I crosschecked the two lists and created a 'rural classification' column and then one-by-one; I searched the original Colorado principals' spreadsheet and manually identified each district as rural, small rural, or non-rural. The Colorado principals' spreadsheet contained 178 school districts, which translated to 1,633 schools. Of the 1,633 schools, I classified 192 or 11.76% as rural and 196 or 12% as small rural. Combined, these schools equated to 384 or 23.52% of the total Colorado school-count population. Of the 388, 64 or 16.49% of schools on the original Colorado principals' list showed one principal name across more than 1 school and 47 or 12.11% contained no principal name and/or email address.

The rural school leader email addresses for each of the sixty-four (64) duplicates were reviewed for address completeness to increase the opportunity of reaching the identified population. These email addresses were not reviewed or validated for accuracy

against information on any of the school's websites. Once the email addresses were examined for completeness, sixty-four (64) duplicate records and forty-seven (47) incomplete records were removed from the master population and placed in a separate tab within the same spreadsheet leaving only one original entry and a revised participant population (N) of 273.

Human Subject Protection

Through the informed consent process, all participants were informed of and were required to acknowledge they understood their rights (Creswell, 2008) within the scope of this research study. The University of Denver's Institutional Review Board (IRB), on April 10, 2014, approved the research study procedures as Exempt (see Appendix C), "categories which imply that the protocol is minimally risky and certain aspects of the study do not require the Board's continuous review" (University of Denver, 2014, p. 1) to ensure data were collected in an ethical and non-harmful manner. All participants, regardless of the instrumentation used to collect the data, were assured multiple times throughout the process: they could stop participation in this research study at any time and without any consequences.

Quantitative phase. To ensure human subject protection, I used the Qualtrics survey tool. Each participant, within each of the four self-completion questionnaires were provided six rule-driven, attestation questions whereby if the participant chose "no" to any one of the questions, the self-completion questionnaire would immediately terminate and would not permit the participant to continue. None of the incomplete surveys, collected through the survey tool, contained a "no" to any of the attestation questions.

Qualitative phase. At the time their interviews were scheduled, just prior to the

start of the interview phase, participants were advised through email they could terminate

their participation in this research study at any time and without consequences. They

were also advised of this protection within the Informed Consent form (see Appendix D-

1). The objective of qualitative research, in general, is not to generalize the findings to the

larger population, but to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied

and to confirm quantitative data with qualitative experiences (Bryman, 2012; Creswell,

2007). Thus, in order to ensure human subject protection and valid data collection, those

who self-selected into the qualitative portion of the study, were required to complete the

Informed Consent form ahead of beginning the interview.

Ethical Considerations

Participant anonymity was assured at multiple steps through the participant

recruitment and scheduling processes. Seven (87.50%) of the eight participants provided

a pseudonym with which to be identified, and one participant (12.50%) initially elected

not to have a pseudonym. I advised the participant I would select a name in order to

remain compliant with the University of Denver's IRB approval of this research study.

The participant provided a pseudonym at the end of the interview. All connections to

identifier codes were destroyed at the completion of the member-checking exercise.

The use of semi-structured interviews gives way to opportunity whereby the

participant is given time and space to "disclose thoughts and feelings" (Newton, 2010, p.

6) that may have been previously determined private. Thus, the importance of participant

confidentiality, on the part of the researcher, in all circumstances is critical to the success

of the study, future research publications, and reputational risk for both the researcher and the university. The use of a semi-structured interview methodology is guided by the participant's trust and "relies on the inter-personal skills of the interviewer and the ability to establish relationship and rapport [all] qualities [that] are valuable but ethically very sensitive" (Newton, 2010, p. 6). It was, is, and will continue to be important for me to remember that as a researcher, I am representing the University and the population of other doctoral students and candidates. This representation is built on a foundation of trust, integrity, and professionalism, which extends beyond the University of Denver Honor Code (2014) and includes the perception of the research participants and others who may be directly and/or indirectly affected by this research. How this research was designed, the questions that were asked, and how the participants were represented within the context of this research are foundational to this research and future research studies.

Instrumentation and Data Sources

Quantitative Phase – Survey Instrumentation

Self-completion questionnaires, more commonly known as surveys, are completed by the research study participants without direct influence by the researcher (Bryman, 2012). Further, Bryman suggested, in social research, self-completion questionnaires along with structured interviews as instrumentation have been determined to be similar methods and the most common ways in which data are collected. Like many areas of social research, the use of self-completion questionnaires is subject to advantages and limitations. Advantages and limitations, as expressed by Bryman (2012) are represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Self-Completion Questionnaire – Advantages and Limitations

Advantages	Limitations
Cheaper to administer	Cannot prompt, probe
Quicker to administer	Cannot ask many questions salient to respondents
Absence of interviewer effects	Difficulty in asking other kinds of questions
No interviewer variability	Questionnaire can be read as a whole
Convenience for respondents	Do not know who answers
	Cannot collect additional data
	Difficult to ask many questions
	Not appropriate for some kinds of respondents
	Greater risk of missing data
	Lower response rates

Note. Table created from sub-headings from Chapter 10 of Bryman's (2012) Social Research Methods Book; 4th Edition.

Awareness of these advantages and limitations contributed to the careful development, sequencing, and grouping of the survey sections and questions. Existing rural school principal-based literature published between 2003 and 2013, as collected, reviewed, and reported by Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013), was used to guide the development of the four survey instruments deployed to Colorado's rural school leader population, as described within the research design section of this chapter.

Primarily, dichotomous (e.g., *yes* or *no*, *true* or *false*) questions (Battey, 2014; Trochim, 2006) were used to gain information with which to group the respondents into nominal categories. This included a several-question demographic section within each of the four surveys. The purpose for including a demographic section was to learn more about each survey's respondent characteristics (Battey, 2014). In very few instances, opinion questions were asked using the Likert scale method.

Qualitative Phase – Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide me during the qualitative interview process. The purpose for selecting this instrumentation type was underpinned and supported by this research study's exploratory motive. A semi-structured interview protocol, according to Bryman (2012), offers the researcher and interviewee "a great deal of leeway" (p. 470). However, the results generated from the use of the semi-structured protocol may prove problematic when connecting the answers to the questions to the overarching research question (Stake, 2010).

The interview protocol used in this research study (see Appendix E) contained 46 total questions, organized into the categories of (a) participant information; (b) places and spaces—location, environment, and ecology; (c) lived experiences; (d) experiential pedagogies; (e) agency and participation; and (f) general questions. As part of the interview confirmation process, an email containing the Informed Consent form, the Copy of the Results form, the Pseudonym form, and the interview protocol was sent to each participant. The three forms had to be completed and returned prior to or within a few days past the scheduled interview time. All three forms were received from all participants, and all consented to participation in the research study.

The purpose for providing the interview protocol ahead of the scheduled interview was to permit the participants time to review the categories and questions in order to write down ideas and thoughts about what they wanted to cover in their interview. In three of the eight interviews, the participants admitted to not having spent any time reviewing the protocol ahead of the interview.

Mixed Methods Data Collection Strategy

The mixed methods data collection strategy drawing upon multiple sources of information, was chosen for this research study to "improve the quality of evidence" (Stake, 2010, p. 125) collected as part of this research study and to "gain an understanding of the problem" (Creswell, 2008, p. 15) when the use of a single research method is inadequate. Mixed methods data collection includes qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2008; 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Stake, 2010).

A few benefits to using a mixed methods approach, according to Bryman (2006), include (a) the counterbalance between the inherent weaknesses and "strengths" (p. 13) of quantitative and qualitative approaches, (b) the increase of research reliability, (c) an increase in the depth and breadth of the data to support the research question, and (d) "practitioner utility" (p. 13). However, whereas the use of mixed methods may have its benefits, its use calls into question researcher qualifications. To gain these qualifications, Creswell (2008) suggested researchers complete "quantitative and qualitative coursework, have committee support, and have time and resources" (p. 16) available to support the commitment. My qualifications to engage in mixed methods research were met through each of these suggestions purported by Creswell.

Quantitative phase. The questions constructed for each of the surveys were developed using Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool in use by the University of Denver and made available to its students. Collectively, all four surveys totaled 183 questions. Each survey could be completed in as little as 12 minutes to as high as 22 minutes

without supplying any supporting comments. The participants were not given a time limit with which to complete each of the surveys, but they were given an end date of June 30, 2014 at 5:00 p. m. mountain-time (MT). Survey 1 contained a total of 70 questions, Survey 2 contained a total of 47 questions, Survey 3 contained a total of 40 questions, and Survey 4 contained a total of 26 questions (see Appendix F for a copy of each of the surveys).

Participant recruitment and response analysis. On May 29, 2014 at 6:27 p.m. (MT), the first survey instrument was delivered electronically via email to the population (N) of 273 rural school principals. Upon the first distribution, 104 (38.10%) of the emails returned a spam/virus firewall message; 1 (less than 1%) returned an out-of-office reply citing the principal was no longer employed by the district; and within 48 hours of the initial survey distribution, and 3 (less than 1%) indicated they were not interested in participating, citing time and interest level as reasons. I received a subsequent email message from one non-participant, indicating interest in seeing the results upon the completion of this research. The distribution list was revised to a new population (N) of 165, a 42.97% reduction from the original population of 384.

On June 2, 2014 at 8:15 p.m. (MT), the second survey was distributed to the revised population (N) of 165. Upon the second distribution, 14 or 8.48% of the email messages were returned as undeliverable. These email addresses were removed from the master list, leaving a revised population (N) of 151. On June 6, 2014 at 8:34 p.m. (MT), the third survey was distributed to the revised research population (N) of 151. No return emails were received indicating an undeliverable address. On June 9, 2014 at 7:15 p.m.

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(MT), the fourth and final survey was distributed and no return emails were received. All

four surveys remained available to the survey population until June 30, 2014 at 5:00 p.m.

(MT). It is noted that the organization of the surveys developed and used for this research

were based on extant literature (Preston et al., 2013) headings, sub-headings, and results.

As displayed in Table 2, a decline between the number of surveys started and the

number of surveys completed is noted and is expressed as a percentage under the

heading, survey fallout. The survey fallout percentage, over the course of the survey

availability period, declined 7.33%, from 13.04% with the first survey to 5.71% in the

final survey. This percentage decline indicates an increase in the number of surveys

started and completed by survey respondents.

Table 2

Survey Response Distribution

Survey Number	Survey Topic	Count (N)	Surveys Started	Surveys Completed (n)	Response Percent	Survey Fallout Percent
1	Demographics, Personal History, and Community Focus	165	46	40	24.24	13.04
2	Diverse Roles, Faculty Recruitment, Faculty Retention, and Support	151	55	49	32.45	10.91
3	Professional Development, Leadership, Technology, and Resources	151	53	48	31.79	9.43
4	Accountability, Big Data, Vocational/Technical Programs, Change	151	35	33	21.85	5.71

Note. Organization of the surveys developed and used for this research were based on
extant literature (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013) headings, sub-headings, and
results.

Analysis of the matched internet protocol (IP) addresses between each survey

revealed the following survey completion characteristics: 17 respondents completed all

four surveys; 11 respondents completed Survey 1 but did not complete Surveys 2, 3, or 4;

10 respondents completed Surveys 1 and 2; 2 respondents completed Surveys 1 and 3 but skipped Survey 2; 4 respondents completed Surveys 1 through 3; and 2 respondents completed Surveys 1, 3, and 4 but skipped Survey 2.

Factors corresponding to the survey completion characteristics could not be determined. Moreover, it should be noted that survey completion characteristics only take into account the respondent's having completed each survey on the same computer. If the respondent forwarded the survey link(s) to an alternate email address and completed any of the surveys from a different computer, the survey response characteristics would be skewed. Four of the respondents over the course of the survey timeline skipped Survey 2; however, Survey 2 had the greatest number of completed responses at 32.45%. This anomaly may suggest the subject matter covered in that survey may not have been of interest to those four respondents, or perhaps the second survey was overlooked altogether.

Qualitative phase. Through the first survey distribution only, survey participants could elect to participate in the interviews by providing their name, telephone number, and email address. The opportunity to self-select into the interview population occurred when the participant reached Question 70, the last question offered as part of Survey 1. Through this method, 25 or 62.50% of the participants who completed Survey 1 expressed an interest in being contacted for an interview. Each interested participant was provided a follow-up email (see Appendix G) and if that person remained interested, was asked to select in Doodle^{TM} (a free web-hosted scheduling tool) dates and times that best fit within his or her schedule. Once I confirmed a date and time with the interested

participant, that period was removed from the selection in order to prevent schedule

conflict with another interested participant.

Of the 25 interested participants, 13 or 52% were scheduled. Of those 13, 3 or

23.08% failed to show during their scheduled interview times and did not reply to a

follow-up email, 8 or 61.54% completed the interview without rescheduling, 1 or 7.69%

was unable to complete the interview despite three separate attempts to reschedule, and 1

or 7.69% expressed disappointment in my inability to identify a time that best fit within

that person's schedule. (Dates and times offered by the interested person did not align to

my date and time schedule.) Those interested participants who were unable to reschedule

after multiple attempts were provided an email indicating I would contact them via email

at a later date if additional participants were needed; one person replied, acknowledging

willingness to participate at a later time. No participant was compensated at any point

before, during, or after the data collection process.

In an effort to rapidly build a rapport and participant trust (Seidman, 2006) with

minimal face-to-face and/or in-person contact, I disclosed my rural background,

education, and the purpose of this research to the participants via email, as an

introductory component during the face-to-face Skype^{TM} and in-person interviews (see

Appendix G). Interviews were conducted for the qualitative phase using a sense of

"formality" (Seidman, 2006) and a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix G).

Semi-structured interview questions are general in nature, have the ability to be

re-sequenced, and can provide an opportunity for the researcher to ask additional

questions (Bryman, 2012). Of the 8 interviews, 7 or 87.5% occurred using the Skype^{TM}

technology and 1 or 12.5% occurred in-person on the University of Denver campus in a semi-private setting. Each participant chose his or her own location to participate in the interview without any influence from me. Of the 7 interviewed using Skype, 5 or 71.43% completed the interview from what appeared to be their home, and 2 or 28.57% completed the interviews from what appeared to be their school office.

To conclude qualitative data collection, several key elements must be reached. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), this occurred (a) "[when] no new or relevant data seem to be emerging regarding a category; 2) the category is well-developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation; and c) the relationships among categories are well-established and validated" (p. 212). Similarly, Creswell (2007) stated, "[when] I no longer find new information that adds to my understanding of the category" (p. 240). During the course of my data collection, I appeared to reach a point where I no longer found anything new about the research topic just after my fifth interview. However, I had already scheduled interviews 6 through 8 and felt a commitment to the participants. Interviews 6 and 7 contained no new information, but interview number 8 offered new information, which could be attributed to the geographic context of the rural school and rural school leader.

Memoing (journaling). The flurry of data collection activity occurring within the concurrent data triangulation research design encouraged me to seek an additional method of support prior to the commencement of data collection. This support method would be necessary to recall ideas, thoughts, and emotions that otherwise might have been lost during the data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis phases.

Researchers use memoing or journaling as an assistive process within qualitative research to bridge these gaps between the time data are collected and the time data are analyzed. According to Groenewald (2008),

> Memoing is the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher (fieldworker, data coder, and/or analyst) is learning from the data, [and it] add[s] to the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research provid[ing] a record of the meanings derived from the data. (p. 4)

As a measure to ensure I had exhausted every opportunity available to assure research credibility and trustworthiness, I employed the memoing praxis during each participant interview and during each session of the coding and analysis process to record my ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Memoing occurred through hand-written annotations in a blank, 60-page, college-ruled journal, as well as within Microsoft Excel on a datum-by-datum basis, as appropriate during the coding process.

Data Coding Procedures

All qualitative data were collected from the comments sections of the quantitative surveys and the qualitative participant interviews and placed in a password-protected Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to begin coding. The coding spreadsheet contained the following headers: (a) primary key, (b) survey/interview indicator, (c) primary theme, (d) Sub-theme 1, (e) Sub-theme 2, (f) Sub-theme 3, (g) role, (h) participant name (pseudonym), (i) gender, (j) key quote indicator, (k) page number from where the quote/information was extracted, (l) word/phrases/comments used in that code, and (m) researcher memo.

Coding by itself offers a structural foundation for the identification of patterns within the collected data but fails to provide the patterns and ideas with which to explain

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the data. As such, my next step was to conduct analysis, defined as the "search for patterns in data and for those ideas that help you explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (Bernard, 2011, p. 338). The importance of analysis is best articulated by Goodall (2000) who stated, "Analysis and coding of conversations and practices are really parts of the overall process of finding patterns that are capable of suggesting a story, an emerging story, or your interpretation of culture" (p. 121). Retaining the integrity of the mixed methods research design, data coding of the qualitative and quantitative strands occurred independently from each other and in cycles as discussed in the following section.

Primary Coding Cycle

The initial method of exploratory coding I used to capture "answers to research questions within the context in which the phenomena naturally occur[red]" (Saldaña 2013, p. 15), is identified as holistic. "Holistic coding applies a single code to each large unit of data into the corpus, in order to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 141) and served as the method in the first cycle of coding. The term *corpus* is defined as "a collection or body of knowledge or evidence" (Oxford-English Dictionary, 2014, p. 1).

All qualitative data collected were initially thematically coded using a holistic (Saldaña, 2013) approach via Microsoft Excel. Once the initial coding was complete, both the first and second cycles of coding occurred. According to Saldaña (2013), selection of an appropriate coding structure is just as important as selecting an

appropriate research methodology. The length of time to code the collected qualitative data was approximately six weeks at approximately 20 hours per week.

Secondary and Tertiary Coding/Re-Coding Cycles

To support the notion of multiple coding cycles, I employed a second cycle of "re-coding" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8) that employed a structural or utilitarian coding approach. This approach was guided by "question-based code [and] acts as a labeling and indexing device, allowing researchers to quickly access data likely to be relevant to a particular analysis from a larger data set" (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2007, p. 141). Beneficial to this research study, is the assertion that "structural coding generally results in the identification of large segments of text on broad topics; segments that can then form the basis for an in-depth analysis within or across topics" (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 2009, p. 214).

Once the initial coding activities were completed, I felt the initial set of emergent themes was too broad, and thus additional coding was required. Due to the significant amount of qualitative data acquired through the mixed methods data collection processes, two and in some cases three additional sub-codes were identified based on my preliminary discovery of "emergent qualities and interrelationships" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 78). Saldaña (2013) described a sub-code to be "a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry" (p. 77). The length of time to re-code the collected qualitative data was approximately, four (4) weeks at approximately twenty (20) hours per week. It should be noted that the length of time that passed to code and re-

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code the qualitative data required extensive and clear memoing to ensure I did not misplace an opportunity to recall thoughts, feelings, and emotions at a later time.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis within the convergent parallel design occurs at only one phase of the research and "entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena" (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). Figure 4 provides a representation of the convergent parallel design, as it was applied to this research study. Here too, retaining the integrity of the mixed methods research design, the qualitative and quantitative strands, in addition to being coded independent of each other, were also analyzed independently.

Quantitative Data Analysis

A significant amount of quantitative data was collected as part of this research study. To learn more about participants, I used version 22 of the IBM SPSS Statistics software, to generate descriptive statistics to group characteristics both common and uncommon to the research study participants. These descriptive statistics, as expressed through frequency tables and percentage distributions, provided answers to research question based on the roles and responsibilities of the Colorado rural school leaders.

Primarily, the use of dichotomous (e.g., *yes* or *no*, *true* or *false*) questions (Battey, 2014; Trochim, 2006) were used to gain information with which to group the respondents into nominal categories. This included a several question demographic section within each of the four surveys. As mentioned earlier, the purpose for including a demographic section was to learn more about each of the survey respondents (Battey, 2014). Opinion

questions, using the Likert scale, were asked in very few instances across all four surveys.

Qualitative Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Upon the initial completion of the transcription, I waited 7 calendar days and then re-validated each transcription's accuracy by listening to the recorded interviews and making requisite corrections. Transcriptions, secured under the participant's chosen pseudonym, were stored in a password-protected folder on my desktop. Upon completion of transcription, the researcher-validated transcription was submitted to each respective interview participant for member checking (see Appendix X). Of the 8 interview participants, 5 or 62.5% completed the member-checking exercise. The results from both the quantitative and qualitative data strands were not combined until the coding and analysis activities were completed.

Member checking. A number of researchers have discussed limitations to qualitative research as being linked to reliability and validity (Simon & Goes, 2013; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009). Because this research study was designed in a manner that employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods, attention to reliability and validity was essential. According to Newton (2010), a primary success factor in qualitative interviewing is accepting the notion that "validity of an interview rests on the extent to which the respondent's opinions are truly reflected" (p. 4). A way in which to address this concern and increase research integrity is through member checking (Guba,

1981; Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These researchers contended checking the accuracy of the data can be conducted during or at the end of the data collection.

Member checking, according to Stake (2010), "is presenting a recording or draft copy of an observation or interview to the persons providing the information and asking for correction and comment" (p. 126) and is "vital to the qualitative process" (p. 127). Participants provided remarks to their individual transcripts where they felt it appropriate, and any remarks that altered the original transcript were made to the transcript prior to the beginning of coding. I enacted version control using a numeric sequence (e.g., v1.0, v1.1, etc.) and the date format YYYY_MM_DD as a suffix to the file name to ensure clear organization and to further ensure I was using the correct transcription for coding. The participant recording for each participant who completed the member-checking exercise was destroyed. At the completion of this research study, all remaining participant interview recordings were destroyed as a condition of IRB approval, dated April 10, 2014.

Assumptions

The following general assumptions guided this research: (a) Participants will meet the research participant criteria set by the researcher; (b) all respondents will accurately interpret the self-completion questionnaire instrument and interview questions and will answer honorably; (c) participants, willing to be interviewed, will be candid in their responses to interview questions; (d) a sufficient number of participants will be willing to participate in both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews; (e) "causal inferences" (Simon & Goes, 2013, p. 2) will not be made from the results of the study;

and 6) results of the study are not expected to be generalizable (Creswell, 2008, 2007; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009).

Method Limitations and Delimitations

The library guide, published by the University of Southern California (2014), described research limitations as "those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the application or interpretation of the results of your study" (p. 1). In this research study, the roles, responsibilities, and lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders may not reflect the same elements if this study were to be replicated in another area of the state or country. Thus, the generalizability of any research findings produced from this research study, as a delimitation, is subject to additional research and study replication to determine if the findings would generalize in another geographic location. "Delimitations of a study are those characteristics that arise from the limitations in the scope of the study and by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made during the development of the study plan" (Simon & Goes, 2013, p. 2). As an example, the results from this study's being conducted in a rural Alaska community may not reveal the same results as those from this study's being conducted in a rural community in central Vermont.

Researcher Limitations and Delimitations

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the time to complete the dissertation research project is a constraint and thus could be considered a limitation. Supervision of this dissertation, closed-loop feedback, and the culminating defense processes constituted ways in which these limitations were minimized. Reasonable and relevant actions were

taken throughout the course of this study to ensure limitations were appropriately

delimited.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the method, design, and procedures used to conduct this

research. A convergent parallel mixed-method design; whereby qualitative and

quantitative data strands were implemented concomitantly and where both strands were

equally weighted (Creswell, 2008, 2007) was used to reveal Colorado's rural school

leader experiences. The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived

experiences of existing Colorado rural school leaders with the objective of explicating

factors embedded within their lived experiences towards understanding how the

continued decline in both the availability of education funding and availability of well-

prepared leaders for rural schools, effects the rural school leader role. The following

chapter provides an initial view into some of Colorado's rural contexts. This view frames

and grounds the presentation and analysis of the results in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5. COLORADO'S RURAL

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it is to introduce the study participants and second, it is to provide an initial view into some of Colorado's rural contexts - both frame and ground the presentation and analysis of the results in chapters six and seven. Data collected from this study's participants revealed both asset and tension-based lived experiences. In some instances, only tension-based information was available. However, in those instances where both asset and tension-based information is available, I include relevant descriptions for comparison. This study's design along with the small participant population ensures the findings are not generalized to the overall populace of Colorado's rural school leaders nor its rural contexts. Further, the design and population also binds the findings within the parameters of the study by removing the opportunity to imply these findings are only isolated to rural school leaders who live and/or work in rural Colorado.

As discussed within the implications section presented in a later chapter, the replication of this study in non-rural contexts may confirm or reject the notion of the study's contextual findings being isolated to rural Colorado. That stated, throughout this chapter, I: 1) present and briefly discuss the Colorado Governor's financial commitment to rural; 2) geographically illustrate and briefly discuss a series of state and university-centered differences; 3) show how the use of a government-sanctioned instrument to categorize race, through its design, appears to have contributed to the marginalization of

at least one study participant; 4) demonstrate salary-based differences between male and female rural school leaders; and 5) illustrate a few of the challenges rural school leaders face as part of their role.

Colorado's Education Funding Commitment to Rural

Recalling from section one of chapter three, prior to President Obama's 2015 State of the Union address, Colorado's Governor, John Hickenlooper delivered his State of the State address on January 15, 2015. On the collective subject of education, the Governor stated, "targeted workforce development and a strong education system are keys to supporting a strong middle class" ("The State of Colorado, 2015," para. 97). In support of the increased strength of the education system, he requested a one-time education budget increase of 8.1% or $480 million to support K-12 education, indicating the state's contribution at "70 percent" ("The State of Colorado, 2015," para. 98). This budget increase, along with an additional one-time $200 million contribution from the State Education Fund would, in part, increase "per-pupil education funding by $475.58 [from $7,020.70] to $7,496.28" (The State of Colorado, 2014, para. 7). This increase in support may be attributed to an increased level of confidence in Colorado's strengthening economy. Regarding Colorado's economy, the Governor stated,

> Colorado's economic activity continues to outperform the national expansion. Total employment and personal income have steadily increased for several years running. The state's unemployment rate stands at 4.7 percent, the lowest since 2008. Looking ahead, the most likely scenario is for the momentum to continue at a steady pace. ("The State of Colorado, 2015," para. 3)

The efforts of Governor Hickenlooper and strengthening economy aside, this one-time financial contribution may only provide temporary relief to rural schools and rural

school leaders as a result of the Governor's not having addressed budget shortfalls

through a more sustainable, long-term strategy. Relative to higher education funding in

the state, 14.1% or $107.1 million in additional funds were proposed, along with "$30

million for the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative" ("The State of Colorado,

2015," para. 8), created in 2014 under House Bill 14-1384 (hereafter referred to as the

Bill). The purpose of the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative, according to the

details of the Bill, is to:

> Award scholarships or grants based upon a rigor-based method to students who
> are classified as Colorado residents for tuition purposes; and 2) develop the
> connections and community partnerships necessary to ensure that every Colorado
> student has the support needed to enter a postsecondary opportunity, persist and
> succeed, and enter his or her desired position in the workforce. (Colorado Capital
> Watch, 2014, p. 1)

These efforts, in part, are because of the No Child Left Behind legislation

(NCLB) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver,

approved for Colorado by Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, in February 2012. This

2-year waiver expires at the close of the 2014-2015 school year, and CDE applied for

waiver renewal ahead of the March 31, 2015 deadline. According to CDE (2014),

"submitting its updated request for ESEA flexibility, [we] hope to renew waivers of

fourteen ESEA provisions and their associated regulatory, administrative, and reporting

requirements through the end of the 2017-2018 school year" (Colorado Department of

Education, 2015, para. 3).

On December 29, 2014, CDE announced its plans for initiative expansion "aimed

at supporting and enhancing educational opportunities for schools and students

throughout rural Colorado" (p. 1). Such expansion included five new program initiatives:

(a) improving teacher quality grants at a cost of $633,000; (b) beginning roundtable meetings to support the development of the educator pipeline; (c) beginning concurrent enrollment professional development to increase teacher credentialing; (d) expanding career exploration through Colorado GEAR UP, a program to support first-time college families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds; and (e) funding and the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative, awarding approximately 11.33% or $3.4 million of the $30 million in allocated grant funds to the 2015 rural initiative.

Overview of Colorado's Rural

According to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in October 2014, a state-wide total of 178 school districts existed; a slight decline from the 183 districts reported for 2007 (CDE, 2011). Of Colorado's 178 school districts, 148 or 80% have a classification of either rural or small rural. In short, this means more students distributed among fewer school districts and fewer schools. The 148 school districts, reported by CDE (2014) educate more than 150,000 of Colorado's rural and small rural students; totaling approximately "20 percent of Colorado's students" (para. 2). The Rural School Community Trust (2014) reported Colorado to have just over 122,000 rural school students in the 2010-2011 school year. Thus, data reveals an increase of just over 28,000 in a four-year span from 2010 through 2014. In comparison with the state's population increase, from 2000 through 2014 there has been a 24.52% increase (just over one million) in the overall state's population (U.S. Census, 2014).

To visually contextualize Colorado's rural, the map in Figure 5.1, produced using an interactive online software by ZeeMaps^{TM}, begins to support why education levels

among some of Colorado's rural school leaders, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, may

not meet the minimum state requirements and remain a means of frustration by some of

Colorado's rural school leaders. This map includes the distribution of schools classified

as rural and small rural, the location of the universities in Colorado that offers

administrator and/or principal preparation programs and the distribution of ski resorts.

The purpose for including the distribution of ski resorts is to illustrate, in part, how the

local resort economy may have both positive and adverse effects on education funding. In

one instance, one research participant indicated his or her rural school's education

funding was sufficient. This anomaly is further explored in the following chapter.

Also included on this map, are the meeting locations reported by the Rural

Education Council (REC). The REC meeting locations, represented by the lavender

colored pins on the map in Figure 5, indicates that meetings are sometimes held near

resort locations or within a less than one-day driving distance to Denver. A review of the

meeting locations, suggests the entire southeast quadrant has yet to be visited by the

REC. The southeast quadrant has 16.45% of its schools classified as small rural, the

second highest in the state.

Rural and Small Rural School Distribution, University Locations, and Ski Resorts

There are 388 rural schools within the 148 rural Colorado school districts; 196

schools are classified as small rural that are represented by orange-colored pins on the

map and 192 are classified as rural, represented by blue-colored pins. Colorado's twenty-

one ski resorts are represented by the bright pink-colored pins on the map. The

percentage distribution between small rural and rural is 50.52% (196) and 49.48% (192)

respectively. The 388 rural schools are distributed among 152 municipalities across Colorado. Just under 60% (89) of the municipalities have only small rural schools, 40.13% (61) of the municipalities have only rural schools, and 1.32% (2) municipalities have schools classified as both rural and small rural. The two municipalities that have both rural and small rural schools are Durango, with eleven rural schools and one small rural school and Monte Vista, with six rural schools and two small rural schools.

There are 90 municipalities that have a school classified as small rural; 65 or 72.22% have more than one small rural school while 25 or 27.78% of the 90 municipalities have only one small rural school. There are 62 municipalities that have a school classified as rural; 50 or 80.65% have more than one school classified as rural whereas 12 or 19.35% have one rural school in that municipality. Overall, of the 410 municipalities in Colorado, 152 or 37.07% have at least one school classified as rural.

Northeast quadrant. Organized into four quadrants, the northeast quadrant of the state represents the highest percentage of rural schools in Colorado at 34.21%. Of the 34.21%, 23.03% are classified as small rural and 11.18% are classified as rural, an 11.84% difference in distribution between the two classifications. Further, this quadrant has 4.76% or 1 of the 21 ski resorts in Colorado. As of February 2015, Colorado's REC has held two meetings in the northeast quadrant of the state.

The northeast quadrant is an example of uniqueness because the classification of small rural schools in the northeast quadrant is the highest in the state, whereas the schools classified as rural are more concentrated and closer to Interstate 25 (I25), showing closer proximity to urban and suburban areas. Further uniqueness is represented

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by schools classified as small rural in and around what appears to be more suburban areas.

Figure 5. *Rural and Small Rural School Distribution*
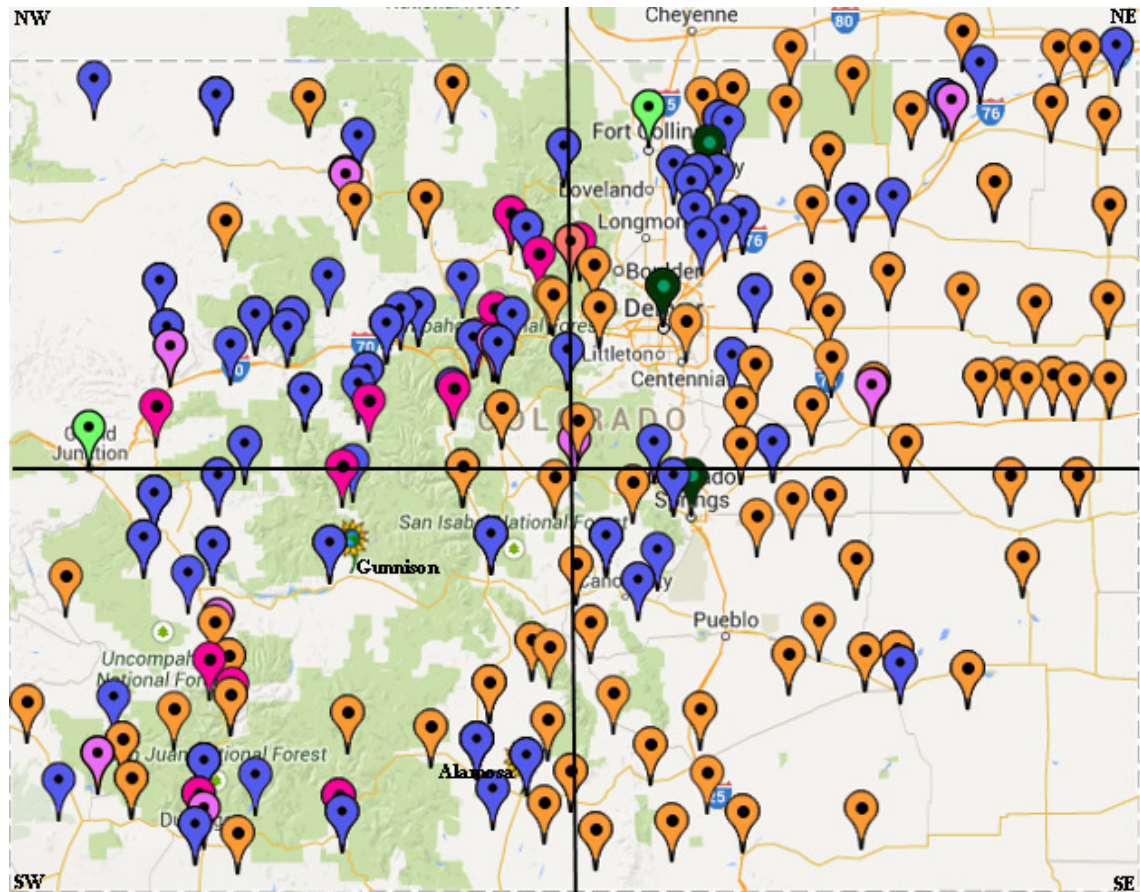
Figure 5. Rural and small rural school distribution in Colorado. Of the 388 rural schools within the 148 rural Colorado school districts, 196 schools are classified as small rural and 192 are classified as rural. Also shown is the distribution of colleges and universities that have administrator and principal preparation programs and are located in an area classified as rural or small rural as well as the distribution of ski resorts and the location of meetings held by Colorado's Rural Education Council (see Appendix X for the map key).

Southwest quadrant. The southwest quadrant of the state has the second highest number of rural schools at 24.34%; 12.50% are classified as small rural and 11.84% are classified as rural, a difference in distribution of less than 1%. This quadrant, against the whole of the state, represents the closest in rural and small rural percentage distribution.

This is an anomaly when compared against the remaining three quadrants. Further, this quadrant has 6 or 28.57% of the 21 ski resorts in Colorado. As of February 2015, Colorado's REC has held five meetings in the southwest quadrant of the state.

Northwest quadrant. The northwest quadrant of the state has the third highest number of rural schools at 21.05%; 15.79% are classified as rural, the highest in the state, and 5.26% are classified as small rural, the smallest percentage in the state and the third highest difference in distribution at 10.53%. This quadrant has 66.67% or 14 of the 21 ski resorts. As of February 2015, Colorado's REC has held three meetings in the northwest quadrant of the state.

Southeast quadrant. The southeast quadrant of the state has the fourth highest number of rural schools at 20.39%; 16.45% are classified as small rural, the second highest in the state, and 3.95% are classified as rural, the smallest percentage in the state, the highest difference in distribution in the state at 12.50%. The southeast quadrant has no ski resorts. As of February 2015, Colorado's REC has held more than one meeting in LaJunta, Colorado, located in the upper northwest portion of the southeast quadrant of the state.

Administrator and/or principal preparation programs in Colorado

In Colorado, twelve universities offer administrator and/or principal preparation education programs (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2013). Locations of these universities are represented in Figure 5.1 as forest green, light green and sunflower pins. The forest green colored pins on the map represent those universities that have both administrator and principal preparation programs; light green pins represent those

universities that have only principal preparation programs; and sunflower pins represent those universities that have only principal preparation programs and are located in an area of Colorado classified as rural. It is noted that no college or university in Colorado has only an administrator preparation program.

Universities with either or both programs include Adams State University in Alamosa; Argosy University in Denver; Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction; Colorado State University in Fort Collins; Jones International University in Denver; University of Colorado in Colorado Springs; University of Denver in Denver; University of Northern Colorado in Greeley; University of Phoenix in Denver; and Western State Colorado University in Gunnison. Adams State University and Western State Colorado University in Gunnison are located in areas classified as rural. No college or university in Colorado is situated in an area classified as small rural. Further, I did not review the neighboring states' colleges or universities or conduct an analysis of online education programs to determine if they support the administrator and/or principal preparation licensure requirements for Colorado. However, I will discuss alternative preparation licensure requirements permitted by Colorado in the following chapter.

A cursory review of each of the 12 universities' published program materials, course titles, and course descriptions revealed the mention of the word *rural* only by the University of Colorado located in Colorado Springs. This mention exists as the last bulleted item within the Online Program section of their Master of Arts in Educational Leadership with Concentration in P-12 Education and Principal Licensure program website, stating the online program is available to "assist educators in rural areas who

have limited or no access to the UCCS campus" (University of Colorado - Colorado Springs, 2015, para. 3). No analysis occurred as part of this research to determine if the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has achieved this objective and to what degree, if any, its assistance has been offered Colorado's rural school leaders or leaders from other states, given the potential reach of its online program.

Northeast quadrant. Eight (nearly 67%) of the 12 universities are located in the northeast quadrant of the state. Of these 8, 5 have principal preparation programs. The location of these universities is concentrated along I-25 near the center of the state, revealing the possibility of access-to-education challenges, as an example, for those who reside in Burlington, Colorado, an eastern municipality in Colorado located immediately west of the Kansas border. The distance from Burlington to Denver, according to Google Maps (2015), is 167.9 miles for 2 hr and 32 min drive time. Burlington is just one example. This possibility of access-to-education challenge across other rural and small rural schools in and around the state is more visible in Figure 5.1.

Southwest quadrant. Two and one half or just over 20% of the 12 universities are located in the southwest quadrant of the state, with Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction located directly between the southwest and northwest part of the state; thus, I am allocating half of its potential support to the southwest portion of the state. The two universities located in an area classified as rural are located in this southwest quadrant; they are Adams State and Western State.

Northwest quadrant. Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction, located directly between the southwest and northwest part of the state, could also be allocated as

education support to the northwest. Interestingly, no other university located in the northwest quadrant has an administrator and/or principal preparation program. Maybell, Colorado, a small rural municipality in the far northwest corner of the state, is 177.8 miles, for a 2 hr 59 min drive to Grand Junction, or 259.7 miles, for a 4 hr 39 min drive to Fort Collins, according to Google Maps (2015).

   Southeast quadrant. University of Colorado (UCC) in Colorado Springs is the only university located in the southeast quadrant of the state. UCC, here too, is located along I-25 near the center of the state. Cheyenne Wells, the furthest school located in a small rural municipality, is 137.4 miles, for a 2 hr 18 min drive to Colorado Springs, according to Google Maps (2015).

Colorado's Rural Education Council

   Colorado's attention and commitment to rural is demonstrated through the 2011 creation of the Rural Education Council (REC) as a result of a Rural Needs Study (Fox & Van Sant, 2011) commissioned in 2010 by Dwight Jones, a former CDE Education Commissioner who ended his term after three years, in December 2010. The REC's mission, as communicated by the new Education Commissioner, Robert Hammond, who began his term in January 2011, is as follows: "The Rural Education Council will provide ongoing feedback to me and the Department on the unique needs of rural communities and school districts throughout the state and how those needs can be supported by the Department" (Colorado Department of Education, 2013, para. 1). Commissioner Hammond further stated, "We are making good on our pledge to better meet the needs of rural districts" (para. 1).

The first REC meeting occurred on December 15, 2011 (Rural Education Council, 2011) with fifteen members representing the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB), Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE), Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES), Colorado Rural Caucus (CRC), one rural school board, and eight rural school districts. Overseeing the REC is Keith Owen, the Deputy Commissioner and Tina Goar, the department's Special Advisor on rural needs. Outlined in the first agenda, the REC acknowledged as the first item, a need to find "*balance to the battle that rural education is not one size fits all*" (Rural Education Council, 2011, p. 1). Later in the same agenda, the REC indicated it would take on the task of "educating the general public as to what rural education really is" (Rural Education Council, 2011, p. 1) revealing an awareness of a knowledge gap by the state to be resolved by the council over time. However, no description was provided on what this approach might be; and as of April 30, 2015, this topic has not appeared again on any agenda as a discussion item nor has there been any evidence to suggest the REC measures their progress.

A review of the REC's agendas, meeting notes and presentations between December 11, 2011 and April 30, 2015 reveals sixteen meetings held on a quarterly basis at often different locations throughout the state. Some of the REC meetings have been held in Breckenridge, LaJunta, and Parachute, Colorado on more than one occasion. REC meetings have been held at resorts, hotels, district BOCES office, and at schools in rural areas. A review of the December 13, 2012 *Future Topics for the Rural Education Council* agenda, illustrated planned discussions in 2013 around rural school leaders' "successes, opportunities, and status of their multi-hat role[s]" (Rural Education Council, 2012, p. 1).

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One of the REC's early objectives was to revise CDE's rural school district definition. On January 28, 2013, CDE in partnership with the REC announced a revised definition to school superintendents and BOCES directors. To reiterate, this new definition states:

> A Colorado rural school district is determined to be rural based on the size of the district, the distance from the nearest large urban/urbanized area, and having a student enrollment of approximately 6,500 students or fewer. Small rural districts are those districts meeting these same criteria and having a student population of fewer than 1,000 students. (Colorado Department of Education, 2013, p. 1)

This change in definition has formed a descriptive parameter within which the Rural Education Council and the state have operated. The reason for why a new definition was created was not sought out as part of this research study.

In the February 8, 2013 REC meeting notes, with no answers available in the meeting notes, the following question was asked of the REC members: "does it bother you that so many people in the state are clueless about rural?" with a follow-up sentence stating: "most people see through their own experience and most people haven't had any experience with rural" (Rural Education Council, 2013, p. 2). In this same meeting, the published notes indicated further discussion around the rural school leader's dual roles and a plan for engaging focus groups through a future BOCES meeting. However, there was no indication of a report or study that provided the REC with information to support its aforementioned question and subsequent statement.

A note in the April 26, 2013 meeting notes, towards the progress of professional development among the state's rural areas, cites dialogue between REC members regarding the organization of training classes and workshops distributed across the state

with an acknowledgement towards ensuring these professional development opportunities

are strategically located "to provide limited driving time and fairly easy access for

participants" (Rural Education Council, 2013, p. 1). However, perceptions of progress in

this particular area remain unpublished in public-facing artifacts by the REC and as I will

demonstrate in the next chapter, this continues to remain a source of frustration by some

of Colorado's rural school leaders over one year later.

In January 2014, the Rural Education Council (REC) announced its participation

with the National Association of State Boards of Education's (NASBE) study group on

Rural Education. Other states participating in this study group include "Kansas, Ohio,

Maryland, Maine, Arkansas, Michigan, Guam, New York, West Virginia, and Illinois"

(Colorado State Board of Education, 2013, p. 1). Marcia Neal, Colorado State Board of

Education Vice Chairperson and a Republican board member for Colorado's Third

Congressional District, reported meetings were to be held in March and June 2014 with a

report to be published in 2015. As of May 31, 2015, a report has not been published and

meetings on this topic seem to have stopped in March 2014 (NASBE, 2014).

A misstatement in Ms. Neal's letter to the public on the REC website, cited

Colorado's definition of rural schools to be "less than 3,500" (Colorado State Board of

Education, 2014, p. 1) and not 6,500 as stated in CDE's letter dated January 28, 2013. No

correction has been published as of May 31, 2015. The REC's agenda items for January

30, 2015 included discussions around Colorado's workforce readiness, growth model,

REC's goals for the upcoming year and closing the achievement gaps in Colorado's rural

schools. REC meeting minutes were absent from the CED website for April 30, 2012;

October 16, 2013; April 30, 2014; July 21, 2014; November 7, 2014; and January 15, 2015. Evidence of progress could be present in these missing artifacts. The missing meeting minutes for the April 30, 2012 REC meeting were due to "technical difficulties" (Rural Education Council, 2012, p. 1) as reported on the website. As an aside, on June 11, 2015, the Colorado Department of Education reported Marcia Neal has resigned from the State Board of Education effective July 2015, where she served since January 2009. Reasons for her resignation were not provided. No other missing meeting artifacts contained an explanation as they were omitted from the website. Further, I did not contact the Rural Education Council to obtain any missing artifacts, to inquire about the REC's research efforts or initiatives, or to inquire on the February 8, 2013 REC meeting minutes.

I have presented Colorado's definition of rural; briefly discussed the Governor's 2015-2016 financial commitment to rural education; and illustrated and discussed the distribution of rural and small rural schools, along with the colleges and universities that offer administrator and/or principal preparation programs, the distribution of ski resorts, and the rural locations the REC has visited since its inception. This presentation begins to illustrate some of the gaps with which the rural school leaders must contend. However, before I present and discuss the data collection results, what follows is a demographic illustration of the rural school leader data.

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE), on April 24, 2015, reported the Colorado's Education Commissioner, Robert Hammond was retiring effective July 1, 2015. Leading the way for Commissioner Hammond, was the resignation of Hammond's

Deputy Education Commissioner, Keith Owen effective June 2015. Mr. Owen served in

the role from April 2013 through June 2015 and is assuming the role of school

superintendent over a non-rural Colorado Springs school district. The education

commissioner role was established in 1950 and was held by Nettie S. Freed from 1950 to

1951. The average length of time, a person serves in the commissioner role is just short of

five years with the longest tenure held by Calvin M. Frazier, who served from 1973 to

1987 (Colorado Department of Education, 2014).

Participant Demographics

This section is organized by age, sex, ethnicity, education level, experience as a

rural school leader, and annual income along with a demographic representation of the

rural school leaders who participated in this research through completion of the multiple

surveys. As a reminder of the survey topics, I am including Table 2 from chapter four.

Those participants who contributed through the interview portion of this research are

referred to by their selected pseudonym. Their roles, locations, and ages are omitted in

order to ensure their protection.

Age

Of the respondents, 45% ranged in age from 30 to 50, whereas the remaining 55%

ranged in age from 50 to 65. Of the 45% between the ages of 30 and 50, 50% or 10

identified as female and 40% or 8 identified as male. Of the 55% between the ages of 50

and 65, 50% or 10 identified as female, and 60% or 12 identified as male. On a national

scale, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (2011-2012), 38.9% of rural

school leaders are less than 45 years old; 34.9% are between the ages of 45 and 54; and

26.2% are over the age of 55. The average age of the research respondents as well as the

national population of rural school leaders is 48 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011-

2012).

Table 2

Survey Response Distribution

Survey Number	Survey Topic	Count (N)	Surveys Started	Surveys Completed (n)	Response Percent	Survey Fallout Percent
1	Demographics, Personal History, and Community Focus	165	46	40	24.24	13.04
2	Diverse Roles, Faculty Recruitment, Faculty Retention, and Support	151	55	49	32.45	10.91
3	Professional Development, Leadership, Technology, and Resources	151	53	48	31.79	9.43
4	Accountability, Big Data, Vocational/Technical Programs, Change	151	35	33	21.85	5.71

Note. Organization of the surveys developed and used for this research were based on
extant literature (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013) headings, sub-headings, and
results.

Table 3

Survey Respondents Reported Age (Organized by Range)

Age (Range)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
30 to 35	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
35 to 40	3	7.5	7.5	12.5
40 to 45	5	12.5	12.5	25.0
45 to 50	8	20	20	45.0
50 to 55	10	25	25	70.0
55 to 60	9	22.5	22.5	92.5
60 to 65	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Note. Participants were asked to provide their current age. I organized the participant
reported age into an age range and reported only those ranges, which surfaced due to
the reported age.

In comparison, 10 or 25% of the survey respondents are less than 45 years old; 18 or 45% are between the ages of 45 and 54; and 30% or 12 are over the age of 55. As a comparison with no inferences suggested, revealed 30 or 75% of the survey respondents were over the age of 45 as compared to 61.1% at the national level.

Sex

Of the respondents across each of the four surveys, on average, male rural school leaders responded 51.9% of the time, whereas females responded 48.1% of the time. On Survey 1 and Survey 3, the male to female response ratio was 1:1 or at an equal distribution of 50% male and 50% female. Surveys 2 and 4 indicated a higher response rate by male rural school leaders by 6.2% and 9% respectively. The distribution of sex between the interview participants was 62.5% male and 37.5% female. No conclusions or inferences have been made from the differences in response rate or interest in participating in the interviews.

Ethnicity

Across all four surveys, 4.10% of rural school leaders who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino responded only to survey 2. The average response rate of rural school leaders who self-identified as Not Hispanic or Latino was 98.98% as 93% of those who responded self-identified racially as White.

Race

Across all four surveys, on average, those who self-identified racially as White accounted for 93% of the responses. On average, 3.44% of rural school leaders declined to answer the question, 2.5% cited their race was not listed, 2.38% reported their race to

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be American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.27% indicated their race to be "Other." The respondent(s) who selected "Other" as their racial identity category in surveys 1 and 2 supplied "Bi-racial" as their racial identity in the text box option. No respondents self-identified as Black or African American.

Comparing this research data against national data for public school principals' race, 90.1% of rural school principals were White; 4.4% were Black/Non-Hispanic; 3.2% were Hispanic – Regardless of Race; and 2.2% self-identified as "Other" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011-2012). No inferences can be made in this comparison, because this research study did not have a 100% participation by Colorado's rural school leaders. I used the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) race and ethnicity categories (1997) within each survey instrument. In the first survey, 2.5% or 1 survey respondent claimed his or her racial category was not present. It is noted that respondents for each survey were given the opportunity to select one or more of the standardized description categories and supply their race through a text box option if their race was not present. The respondent who cited "none of the above" did not provide his or her race within the provided text box option.

I acknowledge the perpetuation of my privilege and power by using standardized ethnicity and racial identity description categories. These categories, by not acknowledging all racial identities, contain inherent power towards the marginalization of underserved populations. Further, I acknowledge that the inclusion of the option for the respondent to self-identify as not having his/her race present might provide the respondent with a vehicle to connect that individual's racial identity to his/her written

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voice with which to be represented in this research. However, the inclusion of a text box

at the bottom of the survey with which to write in the person's race may, through the act

of placement, present an unintended perception of marginalization by the participant.

Sandefur, Campbell, and Eggerling-Boeck (2015) suggested, "self-identification should

be the standard method of collecting racial and ethnic information" (p. 1). The respondent

who provided "none of the above" did not complete any further surveys and/or did not

racially self-identify as "none of the above" in any further surveys.

Education Levels

Across all four surveys, 5.35% of the respondents indicated they had a

professional or specialized degree, 4.83% cited having only a bachelor's degree, 82.69%

indicated they had a master's degree, 6.17% self-identified as having a doctorate or juris

doctorate, and 2.08% cited having some college with no degree. Access to education, as

illustrated on the distribution map (Figure 5.1), could be a contributing factor for a

number of these rural school leaders who did not meet minimal educational requirements

defined by the State. Further discussion around this and related topics are covered in the

following chapter.

On a national scale, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (2011-

2012), 65.9% of principals in rural public schools possess a master's degree, whereas

37.8% of principals in rural private schools possess a master's degree. Further review of

the national data, reveals 1.7% of rural public school principals have earned a bachelor's

degree or less as compared to the 47.7%of rural private school principals. Unlike public

schools, private schools are not funded by public tax monies and are not subject to the

same public school governance (Teach, 2015). No inferences can be made in this

comparison, because this research study did not have a 100% participation by Colorado's

rural school leaders.

Table 4

By-Survey Respondent Reported Demographic Profile

Variable	Survey 1 n=40 (24.24% of N)	Survey 2 n=49 (32.45% of N)	Survey 3 n=48 (31.79% of N)	Survey 4 n=33 (21.85% of N)
Sex				
Male	50% (20)	53.10% (26)	50% (24)	54.50% (18)
Female	50% (20)	46.90% (23)	50% (24)	45.50% (15)
Ethnicity				
Hispanic / Latino	0% (0)	4.10% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Not Hispanic or Latino	100% (40)	95.9% (47)	100% (48)	100% (33)
Race				
Am Indian / Alaska Native	0% (0)	2.04% (1)	2.08% (1)	3.03% (1)
White	92.5% (37)	91.84% (45)	93.75% (45)	93.94%(31)
Refuse/Decline to Answer	2.50% (1)	4.08% (2)	4.17% (2)	3.03% (1)
Other	2.50% (1)	2.04% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
None of the Above	2.50% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Highest Education Level				
Professional/Spec Degree	5.0% (2)	4.08% (2)	6.25% (3)	6.06% (2)
Bachelor's Degree	5.0% (2)	4.08% (2)	4.17% (2)	6.06% (2)
Master's Degree	85.0% (34)	85.71% (42)	81.25% (39)	78.79% (26)
Doctorate / Juris Doctorate	5.0% (2)	6.12% (3)	6.25% (3)	9.09% (3)
Some College / No Degree	0% (0)	0% (0)	2.08% (1)	0% (0)

Note. Am = American, Spec = Specialized.

Experience

The number of years' experience reported as a rural school leader is distributed at

57.5% for less than 10 years and 42.5% at 10 years or more; 25% of the rural school

leaders who participated in this research reported being a rural school leader for 4 years

or less. The second highest range of rural school experience, at 32.5%, was between 5

and 9 years. On a national scale, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (2011-2012), 55.2 percent of rural public school principals reported having less than three years' experience and a close 48.9 percent of rural private school principals reported having less than three years' experience. Of the public rural school principals, 11.6 percent reported having ten or more years' experience as compared to 26.5 percent of the private rural school principals (see Appendix Q). No inferences can be made in this comparison, because this research study did not have 100% participation by all of Colorado's rural school leaders.

Income

The following two tables, when compared, illustrate disparate salary differences between male and female rural school leaders with the same job title. A detailed analysis and discussion of both tables is provided below Table 6.

Table 5

Respondent Reported Individual Annual Income - by Experience

Experience (Years)	$50-$59 (Percent)	$60-$69 (Percent)	$70-$79 (Percent)	$80-$89 (Percent)	$90-$99 (Percent)	$110-$124,999 (Percent)
1 to 2 years	0	2.5	0	0	0	0
3 to 4 years	0	0	10	0	0	0
5 to 9 years	0	7.5	10	0	2.5	2.5
10 years or more	2.50	17.5	10	17.5	10	7.5
Total	2.50	27.5	30	17.5	12.5	10

Note. Individual income is represented in thousands of dollars. I specifically requested the survey respondents to not include their overall household income.

Table 6

Percentage Distribution of School Principals by Salary (2011-2012)

Principal Salary – Public Schools ($)			
Experience	Rural	Urban (City)	All Schools
Average annual	80,200	95,900	85,400
Less than 3 years	72,400	89,000	78,300
3-9 years	80,800	97,800	87,100
10 years or more	85,800	99,200	88,300
Principal Salary – Private Schools ($)			
Experience	Rural	Urban (City)	All Schools
Average annual	58,000	72,500	85,400
Less than 3 years	38,000	61,000	78,300
3-9 years	55,100	71,100	87,100
10 years or more	67,600	78,200	88,300

Source. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal, BIE School Principal, and Private School Principal Data Files," 2011-2012.

1-to-2 years' experience. Comparing Table 5 to Table 6, the salary range self-reported by one Colorado rural school leader—a female—was between $60,000 and $69,000. This amount is slightly lower than the national average of $72,000 published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2011-2012. The female rural school leader reported her role to be that of "principal" and not of "principal/superintendent." There were no male respondents with 1-to-2 years' experience who reported an annual income range between $60,000 and $69,999. However, further analysis of male participant data reporting 1-to-2 years' experience revealed an annual income range between $70,000 and $79,999 for 1 participant and $90,000 and $99,999 for 1 participant.

3-to-9 years' experience. Comparing Table 5 to Table 6, Colorado rural school leaders with experience between 3-to-9 years reported an annual income range between

$60,000 and $124,999. The national average of $80,800, published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2011-2012, would reasonably align to the Colorado salary ranges reported, assuming that of the three rural school leaders, one earned $71,000, one earned $91,000, and one earned $100,000.

Of the 13 rural school leaders in this salary range, 3 female rural school leaders (23.08%) with 3-to-9 years' experience reported earning an annual income between $60,000 and $69,999, and 5 of the female leaders (38.46%) reported earning between $70,000 and $79,999. The male rural school leaders in this annual income range began at the $70,000 threshold: 3 (23.08%) reporting an earned annual income between $70,000 and $79,999, 1 (7.69%) reporting an earned annual income between $90,000 and $99,999, and 1 (7.69%) reporting an annual income between $100,000 and $124,999. One male rural school leader who reported an annual income between $70,000 and $79,999 served in both principal and superintendent roles for the district. The $64,999 possible income disparity between the male and female leaders in this range is significant, and although not the focus of this study, it is an important observation to be noted and recommended for future research.

More than 10 years' experience. Comparing Table 5 to Table 6, Colorado rural school leaders with more than 10 years' experience reported salary ranges between $50,000 and $124,999. The average of the range is $87,499, which is just above the range of the reported national average of $85,800 published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2011-2012. One female rural school leader reported earning an annual income between $50,000 and $59,999; 3 female rural school leaders (11.54%) and 4 male

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rural school leaders (15.38%) reported earning between $60,000 and $69,999; 3 female

rural school leaders (11.54%) and 1 male rural school leader (3.85%) reported earning

between $70,000 and $79,999.

At the $80,000 threshold, salary differences by gender with implications towards

a notion of salary-based discrimination, becomes visible. Of the 7 rural school leaders

who reported an earned income between $80,000 and $89,000, 5 or 19.23% of the total

respondents were male and 2 or 7.369% were female. Of the respondents who reported an

annual income between $90,000 and $99,999, 2 or 7.69% were female and 2 or 7.69%

were male. Last, of the total respondents, 3 male rural school leaders or 11.54% reported

having an annual income between $100,000 and $124,999. No female rural school

leaders reported an annual income in this range. Of the two rural school leaders who

reported serving in both the principal and superintendent role, the female rural school

leader reported an earned annual income between $80,000 and $89,999, whereas the male

reported an earned annual income between $90,000 and $99,999.

Role Title. Rural school leader respondents across all four surveys, were asked to

supply their current role title. On average, 34 or 82.53% respondents cited serving in only

the principal role; 4 or 9.04% survey respondents point out they functioned as both

superintendent and principal; 2 or 4.82% respondents cited they served as both principal

and faculty; and 1 or 1.20% respondent reported serving as the superintendent, principal

and faculty within their rural school and/or district. Three of the respondents, reported

their role title as head of school, curriculum director, or curriculum manager. Survey

participants were not asked to provide reasons to support why their titles were anything

other principal and/or superintendent as these differences were not known ahead of this research.

These responses further operationalize and contextualize the role of the rural school leader as defined by a set assumed and understood role responsibilities often associated with the teacher, the principal, and the superintendent. Thus, possessing a role title that demonstrates any combination or variation of these three roles is not something to be engaged in casually. Thus, any evidence that rural or small rural schools are collaborating with universities and colleges for their preparation, as discussed in the prior chapter, was limited to only one university.

Contributing Perspectives

Of the 40 respondents in survey 1, 19 or 47.5% indicated they were born in a rural community. Twenty participants or 50% cited they attended school in a rural community, 36 or 90% specified they possessed personal connections to the rural community, 36 or 90% indicated they currently lived in a rural community, and only 29 or 72.5% of the 40 respondents lived in the community in which they served. Of the 36 who currently lived in a rural community, 7 or 19.44% lived outside of the rural community in which they served. In the following chapter, I present the lived experiences of the rural school leaders that, as a contributing factor, illuminate some of the reasons why they may have chosen to live outside of the rural community in which they served. These reasons include challenges with personal privacy, feelings of being under constant scrutiny, issues of respect, and feelings of being an outsider.

Constant Scrutiny

As a glimpse into these reasons, just over 21 or 52% of rural school leaders feel

their actions were under constant scrutiny by the rural community; and 14 or 35% felt

their actions were only sometimes under scrutiny by the rural community. Feelings of

constant scrutiny appear to have no effect on perceptions of respect as 39 or 97.50% of

the rural school leaders, as illustrated in Table 7, felt they had the respect of the rural

community while 38 or 95% of the respondents, as illustrated in Table 8 felt they had the

respect of the rural school community. No respondents provided reasons for their

perceptions of a lack of respect. Regardless of constant scrutiny and feelings of respect,

their outlook on personal privacy as a stand-alone challenge by some rural school leaders,

ranged from it not being an issue to it being an issue with specific reasons.

Table 5

Feelings of Constant Scrutiny by Rural School Community Members

Do you feel your actions are under constant scrutiny by rural community members?				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	21	52.5	52.5	52.5
	No	5	12.5	12.5	65.0
	Sometimes	14	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 6

Respect of the Rural Community

Do you feel you have the respect of the rural community?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	39	97.5	97.5	97.5
	No	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 7

Respect of the Rural School Community

Do you feel you have the respect of the rural *school* community?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	38	95.0	95.0	95.0
	No	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Personal Privacy

Regarding challenges of personal privacy, as illustrated in Table 9, 26 or 65% or the survey respondents indicated he or she do not struggle with personal privacy whereas 14 or 35% reported the opposite. "Lyn," illustrated her challenges by reporting, "Privacy, I struggle with that still. That your business is everyone's business, and I've heard things about myself that I think, first of all, how would you ever know that, and second of all, not true. You stand in the grocery store, and one aisle over you can hear a story" and "Joe," based on his experiences, stated, "first, you need to know that everybody knows you. There is no anonymity in rural America." An invasion of privacy can happen

anywhere as "Scott," laments, "Sometimes the parents meetings in the vegetable aisle at [omitted store name] are not great."

Table 8

Struggle with Personal Privacy

As it relates to the rural community, do you struggle with a lack of personal privacy?				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	14	35.0	35.0	35.0
	No	26	65.0	65.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

"Carson," provided both sides of the struggle based on his lived experiences, reporting, "…forever's a thing. You have to be careful if you're gonna go out, you know there's always gonna be two families in there. One that says, "Carson," glad to see you're having a drink. And another family is going, hey you're a role model. What are you doing here?" There is a deeper concern to these struggles, which involves what has been perceived as threatening behavior, as "Jaxie," purported, "…I make sure people - when they come up to the gate, I usually don't go right over and open the gate, because I never know what they want for sure. It could be a school matter. It could be a friendly matter. And, I learned from the beginning when I've had threats on the phone from parents saying, '*I'm coming to your house, and I'm getting my kid's homework. You're going to get it for me, because I couldn't get there in time*'…"

In addition, the notion of personal privacy challenges extends to more than just the rural school leader as "Emily," reported, "…I don't know if me more than someone else, but I feel like I do, because of what my husband's role is as well. So it's not just me.

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It's my whole entire family." Ashton and Duncan (2012) confirm these notions from their research stating, "Principals and their families are an integral part of the community where every move is visible and every action noted" (p. 21). Here, the notion of challenges to personal privacy, could lead into the rural school leader residing outside of the community or reducing their involvement in and with the rural community resulting in feelings and perceptions of being an outsider.

Feelings of Being an Outsider

While struggles of personal privacy were reported at 14 or 35%, 22 or 55% of the rural school leader participants felt like an outsider in their rural community, as illustrated in Table 10. No inferences or correlations can be made on whether challenges of personal privacy is a factor of the rural school leader feeling like an outsider.

Table 9

Feelings of Being an Outsider

At any point in your tenure within the rural community and/or rural school community, did you / do you feel like an outsider?				
				Cumulative
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Yes	22	55.0	55.0	55.0
Valid No	18	45.0	45.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

As one survey respondent reports, "…it took me about 10 years, *and* marrying into an established family" and another respondent cited, "…being new [to] this rural community, I was and still am, after almost being here for 10 years, labeled as a transplant." Last, one survey respondent illustrated his or her perceptions of being an outsider as, "I've lived here in the community for [nearly 20] years and at times am still

referred to as an outsider; someone new to the community." The feelings, perceptions or

even being referred to as an outsider by long-standing rural community members, takes

time to dissipate or in some cases may never completely fade from the vernacular used by

some in the rural or rural school communities. Preparing a rural school leader requires

more than just understanding the laws and factors that make up general school operations.

Being prepared to lead a rural school requires an awareness of these and other

experiences that I will discuss in the next chapter.

Interview Participants

In addition to the rural contexts and the overall respondent demographics, the

interview participant information, on a limited scope is provided below in Table 11. No

additional demographic information is provided in order to ensure their protection.

Relative to the total population of Colorado rural school leaders, the participants who

took part in this research study represent less than 1 percent.

Table 10

Rural School Leader Interview Participant Information

Pseudonym	Leader Role	Gender	Age
"Carson."	Principal	Male	55
"Craig."	Principal	Male	48
"Emily."	Director	Female	39
"Jaxie."	Principal	Female	46
"Joe."	Superintendent/Principal	Male	59
"Lyn."	Superintendent/Principal	Female	52
"Scott."	Principal	Male	45
"Thom."	Principal	Male	Not Provided

One interview participant was not concerned if his first and family name was included in the final report. It took some minor effort on my part to encourage his selection of a pseudonym as opposed to my selecting one for him.

Interview Participant Profiles

What follows is a brief qualitative summary of the participants who elected to participate in the interview segment of this study. Information, as it was made available by the participants, is provided. In one instance, one interview participant refrained from providing self-identifying information. His profile contains only the information that he was comfortable providing. Interview participants were from locations from the northwest, northeast, and southwest quadrants of Colorado. No interview participants were located in the southeast quadrant of the state.

Emily. Emily is a female, age 39, has a master's degree earned from an urban university in 2014, is married, and has served as a rural school leader for less than five years. Located in the southwest quadrant of the state, her role is entitled Director and is focused on early childhood education, but the responsibilities of the role are that of a school principal. Prior to her role as Director, Emily was a faculty member in the same rural school municipality with a total population of less than 9,000 people. She has spent most of her life in rural communities – both in Colorado and in Wyoming. In comparison with the other interview participants, Emily was the only participant to report that while she felt she had the respect of the rural community, alternatively she felt that she did not have the respect of the rural school community.

Jaxie. Jaxie, is a female, age 46, has a master's degree, reported being single/never married, and has served as a rural school leader for less than 1 year. Overall, she has been a school leader for less than two years. Located in the southwest quadrant of the state, Jaxie serves as a school principal as was a faculty member for more than 10 years. The population of the municipality for which she serves is less than 900 and she has more than 10 years' experience living and working in a rural community. Jaxie, described her role by saying, "being a rural principal is a 24/7 job."

Lyn. Lyn, is a female, age 52, and does not have a master's degree. She is married and serves in the dual role of superintendent and principal. Located in the northeast quadrant of the state, the population of the municipality for which she serves as a rural school leader is less than 1,100. Lyn has served in her current role more than five years and was a rural school faculty member for more than 10 years. She described the beginning of each school day as, "…every morning I stand up in front of school and greet the kids as they come through, which is something that my predecessor taught me. And it's fabulous."

Thom. Thom is a male and was a rural school principal for less than 5 years. He provided no additional personal information.

Carson. Carson is a male, age 55, married, holds a master's degree and is a rural school principal. He has served in the current role for more than 5 years but has been a rural school principal for more than 10 years. Prior to being a rural school leader, Carson was a faculty member. The population of the municipality for which he serves as a principal is less than 5,500 and is located in the northwest quadrant of the state. Carson

discussed setting boundaries and expectations with his role by saying, "I did make the mistake of getting up and responding to emails at 3 a.m. What are you doing up you know, sending responses at 3 a.m.? So, I learned the habit of maybe while I crafted a response, I wouldn't hit send until 10 or 11 or noon."

Craig. Craig is a male, age 48, married, holds a master's degree and is a rural school principal. He has served in his role for more than 5 years and was a faculty member prior to his current role for more than 10 years. Located in the northwest quadrant of the state and in a municipality with a population less than 9,000, he served a rural school principal without licensure for a brief period. Craig describes the principal role as a rural school by saying, "being a principal at a rural school increases the amount of time required to be at school since it is expected that the principal attend all events at the school and school events away from the school."

Joe. Joe is a male, age 59, married, holds a master's degree and serves in the rural role of superintendent and principal. He has been in his current role for less than 4 years but reported being a principal for more than 5 years. Prior to being a rural school leader, Joe was a faculty member for more than 10 years. Located in the northeast quadrant of the state, the population of the municipality is less than 500. Joe, as part of our conversation, shared some advice he received when he first arrived to the rural community saying, "They're going to talk about you and criticize, but if anything ever happens to you or yours they'll be there for you. So grow a thick skin and do what you think is right and you'll fit in just fine around here."

Scott. Scott is a male, age 45, married, and is a rural school principal. He has

been in his current role for less than 2 years but has been a principal for more than 10

years. Prior to being a principal, Scott was a faculty member in a suburban school and

had never had experience in or with a rural school. Located in the northeast quadrant of

the state, the population of the municipality where he serves as a rural school leader is

less than 15,000. Scott was the only interview participant to report that he did not

experience challenges with personal privacy.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was twofold. First, it was to introduce the study

participants and second, it was to provide an initial view into some of Colorado's rural

contexts - both frame and ground the presentation and analysis of the results in chapters

six and seven. Data collected from the study participants revealed both asset and deficit-

based lived experiences. In some instances, only deficit-based information was present.

However, in those instances where both asset and deficit-based information is available, I

included both descriptions for comparison. This study's design along with the small

participant population ensured the findings were not generalized to the overall populace

of Colorado's rural school leaders nor its rural contexts. Further, the design and

population also bound the findings within the parameters of the study by removing the

opportunity to imply these findings are only isolated to rural school leaders who live

and/or work in rural Colorado.

As discussed within the implications section presented in a later chapter, the

replication of this study in non-rural contexts may confirm or reject the notion of these

findings being isolated to rural Colorado. That said, throughout this chapter I: 1) presented and briefly discuss the Colorado Governor's financial commitment to rural; 2) geographically illustrated and briefly discussed a series of state and university-centered differences; 3) showed how the use of a government-sanctioned instrument to categorize race, through its design, appeared to have contributed to the marginalization of at least one study participant; 4) demonstrated salary-based differences between male and female rural school leaders; and 5) briefly illustrated a few of the challenges rural school leaders face as part of their role. Next, what follows is the presentation of the lived experiences shared by some of Colorado's rural school leaders that occur within the contexts illustrated in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6. RESULTS PRESENTATION

The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders with the objective of explicating factors embedded within their lived experiences towards, where appropriate, an evolution of principal preparation programs; to lay the foundation for later research study inquiries; to determine if the phenomenon being observed may be expounded upon by a current theory; and to conclude if lived experiences contain answers towards a resolution of the two problems which informed this study. This exploratory approach yielded two primary themes with supporting points that are presented and discussed within this and the following chapter. These emergent themes include: (a) the scope and profundity of the rural school leader role, and (b) rural school leader perceptions of role preparedness.

Organized and presented as supporting points under the first theme described as the scope and profundity of some of the rural school leader roles, includes the description of rural school leader's role responsibilities, illustration of factors that contribute to perceptions of role complexity, illustration of factors that contribute to perceptions of role fulfillment difficulty, resource availability and leader choices affecting role delegation, illustration of factors that contribute to role frustration, role burnout, and role departure, and rural as an intentional choice. Under the second theme, described as perceptions of role preparedness, supporting points includes the presentation of retirement timelines and perceptions of current role successor availability, role preparedness within the parameters

of rural experience and rural-specific role preparation, role socialization, and professional development.

Recalling from chapter four, this study's design, along with the small participant population, ensures the findings are not generalized to the overall populace of Colorado's rural school leaders nor all of Colorado's rural contexts. Further, the design and participant population also binds the findings within the study parameters by removing any opportunity to imply the conclusions are isolated only to rural school leaders who live and/or work in areas classified by Colorado definition as rural or small rural. This chapter is organized by the two emergent themes and with it, the supporting qualitative and quantitative data collected from the survey and interview participants, illustrate both asset and deficit-based lived experiences. In some instances, only the asset-based or only the deficit-based lived experiences were shared by the study participants. This is not to say or imply the availability of counter experiences among Colorado's rural school leaders is not present, just their omission is a function of the small number of participants who participated in the study in comparison with the total population of rural school leaders in Colorado.

Theme 1 - Scope and Profundity of the Rural School Leader Role

Role Responsibilities

Results from the Colorado rural school leaders, revealed 38 separate responsibilities associated with their leader role. These functions, alphabetically listed, include: accountability coordinator, active community volunteer, administrative assistant, assessment leader, athletic or sports coach, babysitter/day-care coordinator, building

construction coordinator, building maintenance, bus driver, change agent, college recruitment coordinator, classroom teacher, compliance manager, curriculum designer, disciplinarian/restorative justice coordinator, early learning coordinator, education coordinator, English Language Learner (ELL) Coordinator, faculty evaluator, finance manager, fund raise/grant writer, Gifted & Talented Coordinator, guidance counselor, handy- man/woman/person, human resources and personnel management, instructional specialist, janitor, new teacher induction coordinator, nurse and/or medication administrator, parent leader, political lobbyist, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) Coordinator, reading and math interventionist, registrar, scheduler, snow plow and/or tow truck driver, special education teacher, strategist, superintendent, technology director, Title I Director, and vocational programs coordinator. This list of responsibilities may not be exhaustive, as I did not have the participation by one hundred percent of Colorado's rural school leaders.

The following paragraph represents the top 10 aforementioned list of responsibilities organized in descending order by frequency percentage. The 49 survey respondents reported change agent at 29 or 59.18%; assessment leader was reported by 26 or 53.06%; instructional specialist was cited by 24 or 48.98%; active community volunteer was indicated by 22 or 44.90%; Handyman/Handy-woman/Handy-person and janitor were both reported by 20 or 40.82% of the respondents; classroom teacher was purported by 17 or 34.69%; coach was reported by 16 or 32.65%; parent leader was indicated by 14 or 28.87%; and superintendent was reported by 9 or 18.37% of the survey

respondents. Including only the top 10 responsibilities in this section does not diminish the importance of any of the responsibilities provided by this study's participants.

In comparison with extant literature on rural school leaders and their often-described excessive role responsibilities, the scope of role responsibilities engaged by some of Colorado's rural school leaders, begins to demonstrate their role, here too, as being perceived as possibly complex and potentially challenging. However, despite the challenges associated with the rural school leader role, serving in a rural school is an intentional choice for some. As one respondent states:

> Once I understood that I am a principal 24/7, and that contracted days were only there to fill space on the contract, my stress levels to get things done went down. It is difficult to do parts of my job on my terms and on my timeline because of the interdependence of our district and community. Additionally, my role primarily consists of what is the most important thing that needs to be done NOW. Other important aspects of the job must wait.

This statement suggests the notion of role realization towards the acceptance of the role challenges that some rural school leaders face in their day-to-day roles. However, this acceptance may not remove the difficulties in completing the tasks associated to the role. Moreover, it does appear that role realization may offer space for rural school leaders to engage in effective task prioritization. Thus, effective task prioritization towards task completion may reduce the degree to which they perceive role complexity and role difficulty.

Role Complexity

Role complexity is described through parameters that include understanding how many rural school leaders have role responsibilities that extend beyond those described as administrative, those who serve in a dual role, and by understanding how many of

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Colorado's rural school leaders lead one or more rural schools. Just over 36 or 73% of the

survey respondents, as illustrated in Table 12, indicated they are not currently nor had

they been a leader of more than one rural school. Conversely, 13 or 26.5% reported they

are currently or have been the leader for more than one rural or small rural school at one

time. Of this 26.5 percent, 10 or 20.41% were male and 3 or 6.12% were female. "Lyn," a

rural school leader who serves in a dual role, reported the complexity of her role may

change in the approaching school year saying, "I'm one of the lucky few. Our school is

growing enough that we're adding a principal. I've been doing superintendent-principal

[dual role] for 6 years and next year I'll just be a superintendent. So, it's amazing."

Table 11

Role Complexity – Leader of More than 1 School

At any point in time, are/were you ever the principal leader of more than one (1) school?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	13	26.5	26.5	26.5
Valid	No	36	73.5	73.5	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Table 12

Role Complexity – Count of Rural Schools

Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, how many rural schools did you serve as a principal leader at one time?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	N/A	36	73.5	73.5	73.5
	1 Additional School	2	4.1	4.1	77.6
Valid	2 Additional Schools	7	14.3	14.3	91.8
	3 Additional Schools	4	8.2	8.2	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Note. N/A = No answer provided.

Of the 13 or 26.5% respondents who indicated they are or were the leader over more than one school at one time, 2 or 4.1% cited serving only one additional rural school; 7 or 14.3% indicated they were the principal leader of at least two additional rural schools; and 4 or 8.2% specified they were the principal leader for at least three additional rural schools. Collectively, 13 or 26.6% of the 49 respondents have responsibilities for more than one rural school. The number and type of role responsibilities seems to contribute to the complexity of the rural school leader role. Represented in Table 14, of the 49 respondents, more than 40 or 81% cited their role currently includes or formerly included more than the traditional administrative responsibilities.

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Table 13

Role Complexity – Roles beyond Administrative Responsibilities

At any point as a rural school principal leader, does/did your role include more than
administrative responsibilities?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	40	81.6	81.6	81.6
Valid	No	9	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Of the 40 respondents who answered 'yes' to this question, 19 or 38.78% were

female and 21 or 42.86% were male. The scope of the non-administrative responsibilities

include those tasks previously identified within the responsibilities section, but given the

small participant population who engaged in this study, may not be all-inclusive. "Joe"

discussed the complexity inherent in his dual role by stating, "I probably spend 75-80%

of my time being a superintendent, dealing with superintendent issues, etc. I spend, at a

max, I would say 25% of my time being principal. Much of that is not of my own

choosing." In addition to "Joe," one survey respondent indicated,

> Multiple "other duties as assigned" distract from the three main responsibilities of
> a principal: 1) instructional/learning leader, 2) manager of the systems of a
> school, 3) liaison between school and stakeholders/community.   Other duties
> continue to increase as budgets decrease. In the past three years, I've taken on the
> role of playground supervisor, lunch room supervisor, urgent janitorial needs, and
> maintenance support. When in the past these daily needs were fulfilled by
> individual people for each role and responsibility.

Similarly, another survey respondent reported,

> As a principal of a small rural school, I have had to take on many roles within the
> school building on a daily basis. I have been the sub janitor, the counselor, the
> mentor, the big brother, the fill in coach, the secretary, the lunch Aid, substitute
> teacher, and mental health provider for students, parents and staff. While taking
> care of this on-going daily duties the expectations of being an instructional coach,

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an evaluator and finance officer do not go away and often I spend hours before school and after school getting things completed.

Extending the notion of role complexity beyond the detail of role responsibilities, "Scott," briefly elaborated on his experiences reflecting on his transition from a suburban to a rural school leader. He stated, "I think one of the things I struggled with coming out here [from a suburban district] was the amount of pieces that the principal is involved in." Thus, it could be posited that both the actual and perceptions of actual role responsibilities may contribute to the rural school leaders' perceptions of role complexity.

These perceptions, over time, may further contribute to the rural school leader's position their role is or is becoming increasingly more difficult. As demonstrated in the next section, the count and scope of role responsibilities that some leaders fulfill without the assistance of another administrator or the availability of faculty or staff to delegate to, begin to increase role frustration. In one instance, one survey respondent indicated there is, "not enough time to handle all principal duties and all superintendent duties. In short, too many duties and not enough time" and another survey respondent reported, "Being in the dual role of Superintendent/Principal I have struggled to complete all of the mandates that are usually handled by the Supt. That must be done after school or on days when the students are not in session." As illustrated, in some rural school districts, the complexity of the rural school leader role for some is changing as staff are being added. In other rural school districts, as suggested by some participants, role complexity and role difficulty appears to be a result too many responsibilities and not enough time.

Role Fulfillment Difficulty. "Scott's" statement regarding his transition from a suburban to a rural school district, as I will later discuss, may have implications for

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school leader aspirant internships, externships, fieldwork, and the development of course preparation. As previously illustrated, the count and scope of responsibilities connected with some rural school leader roles contributes to role complexity and in some instances, rural school leader's perceptions of role difficulty. Specific to role responsibilities, as shared by some respondents, suggests the school leader role demands to be excessive in nature and some have difficulty fulfilling their primary role obligations. Illustrated in Table 15, of the 49 survey respondents, 30 or 61.2% respondents reported having a difficult time fulfilling their primary role obligations, while 19 or 38.8% of the respondents had an opposing view. Thus, even though nearly 62% of the respondents indicate some level of difficulty in fulfilling their role obligations, which could be associated to some of the role responsibilities, just under 39% of the respondents reported they were able to fulfill their role obligations suggesting financial and human resources, as an example, are available in which to distribute some of the role responsibilities.

Table 14

Difficulty in Fulfilling Primary Role Obligations

As a rural school principal leader, do/did you feel you have/had a / difficult time fulfilling your primary role obligations?				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	30	61.2	61.2	61.2
	No	19	38.8	38.8	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Drawing attention to some of the reasons behind the notion of role difficulty, one of the survey respondent stated, "A rural principal wears more hats than an urban or suburban principal. There is a greater time commitment" and another respondent

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reported, "Because we are smaller, the principals wear many 'hats' to keep budget costs down." Role demands have caused some rural school leaders to question their effectiveness (i.e., self-efficacy) and to make, what appears to be difficult decisions. As one survey respondent purports, "[there are] too many obligations and tasks to perform with confidence and [a] high degree of proficiency, and another rural school leader reports, "too much work [is] added to [the] principal workload and [there is] too little time to complete the tasks at hand. Professional choices must be made that make me a less effective principal."

In addition to perceptions of self-efficacy, equating role responsibilities to salary surfaced. Recalling salary distribution from the previous chapter (see Table 4 below), one survey respondent suggested, "You have no resources and have to do the job that requires expertise in many different fields. You are spread too thin and then paid like a farm hand and sometimes treated like one; since that is what the rural people know."

Table 4

Respondent Reported Individual Annual Income - by Experience

Experience (Years)	$50-$59 (Percent)	$60-$69 (Percent)	$70-$79 (Percent)	$80-$89 (Percent)	$90-$99 (Percent)	$110-$124,999 (Percent)
1 to 2 years	0	2.5	0	0	0	0
3 to 4 years	0	0	10	0	0	0
5 to 9 years	0	7.5	10	0	2.5	2.5
10 years or more	2.50	17.5	10	17.5	10	7.5
Total	2.50	27.5	30	17.5	12.5	10

Note. Individual income is represented in thousands of dollars. I specifically requested the survey respondents to *not* include their overall household income.

The respondent's editorial comments aside, the salary portion of the statement is not entirely unfounded as nearly 60% of the survey respondents reported an annual salary below $79,999. Referring back to Table 6 in the previous chapter, on average, rural school leaders earn a salary of just over $80,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011-2012). Treatment of the rural school leader by members of the rural or rural school communities was not a focus of this study and examples of disparate treatment was not present in the available data.

Hours Spent Outside of School. To add context to the mounting evidence that supports a notion of excessive role demands on the rural school leader, I asked the research participants to provide how many hours they spend per week interacting with rural community members both during the school year and during the summer. As shown in Table 16, during the school year, 20 or 50% reported spending between five and ten hours while during the summer, the number of rural school leaders reduced from 50 percent to 12 or 30%. Considering the literature which demonstrates rural school leaders already have excessive role demands, 8 or 20% indicated they spend more than 10 hours per week with rural community members and during the summer, the percentage increased to 30 (12).

Table 15

Hours Spent Interacting with the Rural Community during the School Year

During *the school year*, approximately how many hours do you spend per week interacting with the rural community members outside of school hours?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Less than 5	12	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Btwn 5 & 10	20	50.0	50.0	80.0
Valid	More than 10	8	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Note. Btwn = Between.

One survey respondent stated, "Being a principal at a rural school increases the amount of time required to be at school since it is expected that the principal attend all event at the school and the school events away from the school (i.e., sporting events)." To better distinguish how their non-school hours are spent, I asked the rural school leaders if they participate in rural community events (i.e., town parades, fundraisers, etc.). Of the 40 participants, as illustrated in Table 17, 30 or 75% indicated 'yes' while 10 or 25% reported 'sometimes.' Hence, relative to the participation population, data conveys that all rural school leaders are spending at least some amount of time in the community building and sustaining relationships through their attendance at town/community events. However, for those who are spending more than 5 or 10 hours per week in the rural community and only periodically or not attending these events at all, there appears to be more to their story, which did not emerge as part of the findings.

Table 16

Participation in Rural Community Events

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Do you participate in rural community events (i.e., town parades, fundraisers, etc.?)				
Valid	Yes	30	75.0	75.0	75.0
	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Sometimes	10	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Note. N/A = No answer provided.

In support of the notion of role difficulty, what remains are resource constraints as previously mentioned. These constraints are a factor of role difficulty predicated on limited or non-existed administrative support. Therefore, the availability of other school personnel to whom they could delegate some of their role responsibilities to ease some of their burdens, emerged in the data.

Role Delegation. Role complexity and role fulfillment difficulty appear, in part, to be a result of role demands not or not often delegated to other school personnel. In some instances, the availability of additional school personnel is not available due to funding or it is a personal choice by the rural school leader to retain their responsibilities in an effort to mitigate overextending faculty and/or staff. Of the 30 or 61.2% respondents who reported having difficulty in fulfilling their primary role obligations, 25 or 51.02% respondents indicated having other school personnel to whom they could delegate some of their role responsibilities. Of the 19 or 38.8% of the respondents who indicated having no difficulty in fulfilling their primary role obligations, 16 or 32.65% respondents reported having other school personnel to whom they could delegate some of their responsibilities. Therefore, why would such a large number of rural school leaders,

who have other school personnel to whom they could delegate some of their role

responsibilities, experience challenges when fulfilling their primary role obligations?

Table 17

Role Support – Administrative Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	21	42.9	42.9	42.9
Valid	No	28	57.1	57.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Do/did you ever have administrative support (i.e., assistant vice-principal) to assist you with your rural school principal leader role?

Table 18

Role Support – Non-Administrative Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	41	83.7	83.7	83.7
Valid	No	8	16.3	16.3	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Do/did you ever delegate administrative/managerial tasks to other school personnel?

Some of Colorado's rural school leaders reported retaining much of their

administration-specific tasks and it appears that some of their reasons for doing so

include reducing the risk of role burnout by staff and faculty, protection of staff and

faculty happiness, personnel retention, and the protecting the time teachers are in the

classroom. One rural school leader reported, "they [faculty and staff] are doing more than

what is on their job description, I believe it is hard to give them my responsibilities" and

another leader respondent cited, "asking another overworked employee to handle

administrative duties would be unfair and take time away from duties just as, if not more

important than the administrative tasks." Taking it further, one survey respondent really focuses on teaching and student outcomes by saying, "my goal is for my staff to spend as much time teaching students as possible. Instructional and planning time [is] a premium, plus the more paperwork I assume, the less time they [teachers] have away from students." One survey respondent indicated, "I have to take it on to protect my staff so they may concentrate on teaching." There is a level of commitment to the teacher role by some of Colorado's rural school leaders, which seems to illustrate teacher retention as a factor that must be carefully considered as part of the day-to-day leader activities.

During the course of the interviews, three of the rural school leaders offered some further insight into role delegation. One leader indicated task delegation to be a fine art, while another demonstrated a necessary shuffle of people to get the work done and manage the budget. Last, one rural school leader leverages the skills of the business manager to increase his capacity to fulfill primary role obligations.

"Jaxie,"

> Delegation is a very fine art, because they're so overwhelmed. And you put one more thing on their plates, they're going snap.

"Scott,"

> My office manager now doesn't come until 11:00. She works the afternoon. And I have my registrar too, in the morning, so some of that's fallen back on me. [I] check phone calls, call anyone back that I need to, and then it's just kind of, it's, it's a flow. I always have a list of here's the things I need to do.

"Joe,"

> Our business manager ends up handling quite a bit of things that quite frankly aren't a business manager's job. She's very astute, extremely organized. Without that relationship, I don't know what I'd have to do. I couldn't get my job done.

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In three separate instances, survey respondents pointed out, "I have no one else to delegate to", "there just wasn't a person available," and "there is nobody else in the district that has any background or training to do the work." Here, the rural school leader's role demand pressures are demonstrated through the absence of available resources in the school, in the district, or by having other school personnel take on additional responsibilities. Some of the tasks delegated to other school personnel by the rural school leader, as reported by survey respondents, include but may not be limited to "sporting events", "professional development", chair [of] committees that are usually assigned to or the responsibility of the administration" and "some discipline." These tasks, while they may seem reasonable in terms of effort and time commitment, may have an adverse effect in some rural districts such as a decline in role satisfaction for both teachers and rural school leaders.

Role Frustration and Role Burnout. Role frustration and role burnout is a real concern for some rural school leadership as one respondent declared, "I have someone who I can go to for support, but I feel really burned out at the end of each year; questioning my role and whether I should continue or not." These role demands, which may lead to role frustration, role burnout, and in some instances role departure, have been attributed in part, to Colorado's practices of over-mandating and underfunding education. Frustration, burnout, and departure are not limited to just rural school leaders as one survey respondent reports, "we are becoming increasingly discouraged and frustrated. It is more and more difficult for me to hire enthusiastic and highly qualified teachers or to

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retain the good teachers that I have." Some of the reasons for this increasing frustration

that appears to lead to role burnout is clear to one survey respondent as he or she stated:

> Because of the *horrible* funding through state law and the lack of honest
> commitment of funds to education by our legislators in Colorado, we are
> underfunding and over mandating in a terribly [disproportionate] measure. Every
> administrator and every certified teacher in rural schools are dramatically
> underpaid by all state and national standards and every federal and state mandate
> increases the significantly difficult level of responsibility that we carry in
> comparison to our urban counterparts.

One rural school leader discovered a solution to meeting some of her role demands, but it

comes at their personal expense. She reports, "I have even taken personal days to

complete evaluations and to finish district paperwork as I'm unable to complete these

things in my office during the school hours and on a regular basis." Despite some of the

challenges that rural school leaders face in their day-to-day roles, for some, living and/or

working in a rural community is intentional and leaving the role and/or the community

may not currently be an available option. Contributing factors that emerged towards rural

as an intentional choice included family, previous rural experiences, and perceptions by

some rural leaders they could do more for and in a rural school.

Rural as an Intentional Choice. Perspectives on some of the reasons why

Colorado's rural school leaders choose to stay within their rural areas and/or within their

roles, began with my asking if the rural school leaders intentionally sought out rural and

if so, what their reasons were for doing so. Of the 26 or 53.06% of the respondents

indicated they did *not* intentionally seek out rural while 23 or 46.94% rural school leaders

indicated rural was a deliberate choice. Reasons for why rural school leaders elected to

stay in rural were not requested as part of the survey instrument. Of the nearly 47 percent

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of rural school leaders who sought out rural as a place to begin their career, just over 12 or 52% of the respondents were male. "Craig" discussed his rural choice as being the subject of available teaching positions by saying:

> My goal was to be in the Cherry Creek school district or Jefferson County school district; I wanted to be at a big school and coach as a bit school. There weren't many jobs available, you had to take what you could get and [omitted] had an opening.

"Craig" has been part of the same rural community and rural school district for over 20 years. Regarding family and rural experiences, one survey respondent reported that he or she "like rural settings [and] I want[ed] to raise my children in a rural area" and another respondent reported "as parents raising our own children, we wanted to be closer to the community where I grew up. We wanted the support of grandparents in raising our children." In addition, one survey respondent reported, "I grew up attending a small rural school, my first teaching job was in a small rural school, [and] my own children attend a small rural school." Aligned to the notion of family, "Emily" reported, "I've grown up here, was born here, as was my husband." However, family and experience with rural are not always a factor.

Regarding affecting change, survey respondents described that they "felt [they] could impact more students directly being a principal of a small rural school" while another simply states, "I enjoy working at a small school where I can effect change." One survey respondent pointed out, "over the past decade I have seen a *steady separation* of rural and urban/ suburban districts. I felt it was the right place for me to be." "Jaxie," offered some insight as to her rural choice by stating, "so, I was in the very rural areas along with the larger school districts in [omitted]. And they weren't as large as some of

the ones that I've been in, but at least I felt like I had a good variety of experiences and felt like education - I could do more in a rural area. And so that's why I sought it out." While some intentionally sought out rural schools as a long-term choice, some rural school leaders like "Lyn," thought her time in rural would be a short-term solution, indicating: "I could come out here for a year, get some experience." "Scott" gave a little bit of context by saying: "I met my wife…who grew up in a very, very small town in [omitted] Colorado…through the course of that, I got to like the rural lifestyle, the farm, that peace and all that." In a different instance, "Joe" chose rural as part of his identity, citing:

> So I decided loving your job was more important than money…and started off teaching [omitted subject] in [a] small, rural community. And my wife and I decided to have a great adventure and moved for a few years to Colorado, up to the mountains where we belong.

In short, the decision to live and/or work in a rural community were intentional for some and seemingly happenstance for others. However, despite how each of the rural school leaders found their way into the rural school and/or rural communities of Colorado, the common factor among them for staying appears to be an intentional decision. This intentional decision, for some, is an ongoing and deliberate commitment to the rural school and rural community despite some of the role complexities the rural school leaders have described.

 Commitment to Rural and Community Sustainability. Illustrating this point is one survey respondent, who intentionally sought out rural as a place to work, citing:

> There aren't enough hours in the day. I pretty much work the whole year with the exception of winter break, spring break, and two-ish weeks in the summer. There

is always more to do with the current staffing model. I don't mind. I do get stressed from time to time.

This statement may offer some insight as to why some rural school leaders elect to stay in their roles. This rural school leader, who had suburban experience, went on to say:

> I like rural education because I can and do utilize my high energy and interests in many educational and social topics to meet the needs of wonderful children and their supports (teaching staff and parents). I once was an administrator in a large suburban area as a first year assistant principal and my skill set was limited to attendance and discipline. I prefer working at this rural school because I have to be a jack-of-all trades and master of many. It's more fun and fulfilling.

This rural school leader supports the ideology of a commitment to rural as a reason to remain in his or her role. To gain further clarity, in the first survey, rural school leaders were asked if the felt their role included the community welfare responsibility of the rural community that has significant implications for community sustainability. Of the 40 responses, 27 or 67.5% cited that 'definitely yes' and 13 or 32.5% reported that 'probably yes' their role included community welfare responsibility. The extent, to which this commitment is experienced, is explained by 27 or 67.5% of the 40 rural school leaders who felt that if their rural school closed, the continued existence of the rural community would be in jeopardy. One survey respondent asserts, "It seems like the oath a school leader should take." In addition to some of the role demands and pressures described by role responsibilities and related tasks, accepting the responsibility for the welfare of the rural community is a commitment that may exceed the scope of the rural school leader role by someone who has limited or no exposure to rural.

Role Departure

Despite perceptions of rural as being part of their identity, feelings of a strong commitment to rural, or the perceived benefits of living in a rural community on family, role frustration resulting in role departure is also part of some of the Colorado rural school leader's lived experiences. To briefly demonstrate this point, of the 40 survey respondents for survey number one, 5 or 12.5% revealed they were looking for a new role; one or 2.5% refused to answer the question. Of those looking for a new role, 2 or 5% indicated they were looking for a new role outside of the rural community and 3 or 7.5% indicated they were looking for a new role within the rural community. The survey instrument did not contain questions asking the respondents if they were or were not seeking a new rural school leader role. The two survey respondents, who are seeking a role outside of the rural community, indicated the reasons for their departure as:

> Rural schools do not have the funds for continued professional development and training. I want to become a better principal, and I can't afford to pay for it all on my own.

> …significantly higher pay.

In both instances of actions taken towards role departure, these rural school leaders are making professional choices as a result of factors that contribute to perceptions of role complexity and role difficulty. While not knowing the reason for departure, during the distribution of my first survey, I did receive one out-of-office reply from one rural school leader citing she was no longer employed by the school district.

To this point, the lived experiences as shared by some of Colorado's rural school leaders, have been underpinned by a common factor. This factor as pointed by some

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of the study participants, have contributed to their overall notions of role complexities, role difficulties, role frustrations, and eventual role departure. This contributing factor is education funding. Thus, what follows is a presentation of the participant's lived experiences regarding education funding and discussed within the parameters of being adequate, inadequate and for some, a significant role responsibility. Moreover, recalling discussion from the literature review, the negative factor is the primary driver for funding inadequacies across rural and non-rural contexts alike although not all Colorado rural school districts, as I will illustrate, experience inadequate education funding. Regardless, some rural school leaders are left to navigate and narrow the gaps created as a result of the education funding shortfall by calling upon the community for assistance and where available, by drawing upon his or her grant writing knowledge and skills.

Inadequate Funding

Briefly illustrating the effects of inadequate education funding is described by one rural school leader as, "We are facing another 0.4 million cut next year. Our town, I am guessing, does not have the economy to support a mill levy. We will cut again as we did this year, and more will be added to my plate." Survey and interview respondents provided some early insight into the adverse effects of enacted, deficient funding policies and subsequent unfunded mandates. To gain clarity on additional funding needs, which could counterbalance some or all of the adverse effects, rural school leaders shared how much in additional monies, in general, they felt would be needed for their rural school to close their funding gaps.

As represented in Table 20, of the forty-eight who replied, 1 or 2.1% indicated his

or her rural school is sufficiently funded – an anomaly in the data; 15 or 31.3% feel their

school needed somewhere between $100,000 and $150,000 and 10 or 20.8% reported

needing more than $150,000. The one-time monetary contribution to Colorado's rural, as

approved by Governor Hickenlooper, discussed in the previous chapter, will likely not

address the entirety of their reported budget shortfalls.

Table 19

Rural School Funding

According to research, funding for rural schools has been shown to be less than their urban and/or suburban counterparts. On average, how much extra money do you feel your rural school needs in order to ensure students have a satisfactory opportunity to learn?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sufficient Funding Exists	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Between $1,000 and $24,999	3	6.3	6.3	8.3
	Between $25,000 and $49,999	7	14.6	14.6	22.9
	Between $50,000 and $74,999	5	10.4	10.4	33.3
	Between $75,000 and $99,999	7	14.6	14.6	47.9
	Between $100,000 but less than $150,000	15	31.3	31.3	79.2
	Greater than $150,000	10	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

These amounts of money are not insignificant for rural or small rural schools and without the preparation or support, procurement of these additional funds has proven to be another significant challenge to which the rural school leader must contend. However, given the one outlier emerging among Colorado's rural areas, I could not accept that all rural school leaders spent a significant amount of their time pursuing additional funding. To illustrate this point, 38 or 79.2% of the respondents reported securing additional funding was part of their role while 10 or 20.8% respondents reported securing additional funds was not part of their role. Here too, this conveys the message that some of Colorado's rural schools may not need additional funding, or someone else is assigned to assist in this endeavor. As I will discuss later in this chapter, in some instances, Colorado's rural school leaders rely on someone in their district office to assist them with securing additional funding, often identified through grant writing opportunities.

Negative Factor. Some of the survey respondents and one interview participant, without my mention of the negative factor anywhere in the survey questions or within the interviews, provided strong opinions regarding the highly controversial issue. Recalling information from an earlier chapter, an element causing impairment to Colorado's education funding is the negative factor. According to CDE (2014), "the negative factor was put in place in 2010-2011 by the [Colorado] legislature as a way to reduce [education] funding to school districts to balance the state budget" (para. 2) and according to the Colorado Association of School Boards (2014), "the negative factor has forced all Colorado school districts to make cuts to important educational programs"

(para. 7). The monetary losses incurred by school districts over the last five years are substantial and total "three billion dollars" (para. 8).

One participant indicated, "[the] state needs to remove the negative factor", and another participant stated, "legislatures need to return [the] negative factor taken from districts, back into [the] school funding formula", and one survey participant lamented: "we have a negative factor we could have truly backfilled, however, the legislatures nor the Governor took the opportunity to bring back the funding after 4 to 6 years of cutting budgets." While not a feature of the funding issues of the past, the negative factor is a direct link to systemic weakness behind the current financial state of Colorado's rural schools. "Lyn," with a sense of discouraged hope in her voice during our interview, said: "if we just had the money they [the constitution] said we should have without the negative factor, we would be fabulous." A few study participants were able to articulate some of the issues they face as a result of inadequate education funding.

Inability to Purchase Supplies, Out-of-Pocket Spending. The inability to purchase textbooks, provide reasonable and customary raises to teachers, funding capital improvement projects, and out-of-pocket spending by some rural school leaders and teachers, emerged as effects from inadequate education funding in some rural districts. These examples demonstrate the effects from enacted deficient funding policies and subsequent unfunded mandates in Colorado's rural schools.

"Lyn," stated:

> I haven't bought text books for literally 10 years. If I lose a book this year, I'm going to be in big trouble. My teachers haven't had raises. We've done small raises, but not as significant.

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"One survey respondent," indicated:

> [We] need funds for capital improvement projects," and another cites, "there are quality educators who deserve to earn a higher salary. I know teachers who after paying insurance for families take home just a few hundred dollars each month. Basically, they work to insure their families.

"Joe," reported:
> I know that our elementary staff, in particular, spends I would say hundreds if not *thousands* out of their own pockets. There's a lot of that, that goes on. We also have people who very quietly will pay for kids who don't have the resources who have the resources to pay for themselves. He further share, we had a special education teacher that quit last year, that honest to goodness, I would guess she, it probably cost her money to teach here. She was so generous. That coupled with the fact, she was one of the finest special education teachers I ever saw. Lady was awesome. We genuinely miss her. She's still in the area and she still helps the school out.

"Scott," pointed out:

> Our district has been really good at trying to keep any cuts, whether it's student enrollment or the state cuts for the past few years away from classes. and that's, we've dealt with, I would say it's probably been four years, four to five years of every single year looking at district wide cuts.

As previously mentioned, some rural and non-rural leaders have the responsibility of securing additional funding. The availability of donated money by businesses within some of the rural and small rural communities may be limited. Therefore, rural school leaders are charged with finding alternative ways to narrow the education funding gaps. Outside of business and agri-business donations as discussed in the literature, the rural school leader draws upon their skills and knowledge around grant writing, if present.

Grant Funding. Last, as funding is an ongoing concern among some of Colorado's rural school leaders, I wanted to know if they had the skills or experience to close some of the funding gaps through the acquisition of grant-supported funding. This segment also has implications towards the following preparation section. As illustrated in

Table 21, of the 48 survey responses, 33 or 68.8% indicated they did *not* have grant

writing experience prior to starting their leadership role.

Table 20

Grant Writing Experience

Prior to starting your role as a rural school principal leader, did you have grant writing experience?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	15	31.3	31.3	31.3
Valid	No	33	68.8	68.8	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Nearly 92% or 44 of the respondents, as illustrated in Table 22, indicated having

professional development courses on grant writing would be helpful and suggested the

courses be organized between entry-, intermediate-, and expert-level classifications and

42 or nearly 88%, as illustrated in Table 23, felt having a grant-writing mentor would be

useful once the courses were completed.

Table 21

Grant Writing Course – Professional Development

Would having a professional development course on grant writing be helpful?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	44	91.7	91.7	91.7
Valid	No	4	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Table 22

Grant Writing Mentor

Do you feel having a grant-writing mentor would be helpful?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	42	87.5	87.5	87.5
Valid No	6	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

However, while grants may be available and a possible solution, the efforts to

obtain and manage the grants may be more than what these leaders can take on. One

survey respondent commented on this view, by saying:

> Although I have written several successful grants in my early years as a
> curriculum director and principal and as additional resources continue to be
> available through grants, the current demands of the [leader] position (which have
> significantly increased over the last 3-6 years) leave no time available to go after
> grant opportunities, either to write them or to manage the extensive evaluation
> and reporting once one is obtained.

"Lyn," pointed out "we did a lot of things with grants and we all took turns. Now, not so

much" which implies as a matter of competing priorities, here too, the efforts towards

obtaining and managing grants may be too much for today's Colorado rural school leader

and others within the rural school.

Offering a different perspective on grant funding, "Thom," reported, "I learned

quickly is that the grant proposal itself is only maybe 15%of the work. Most of the work

is making the contacts, understanding what the grant [is], what the organizations do,

making sure that you don't piss them off, not being informed, and things like that." Thus,

the level of effort needed to obtain and manage the grants may outweigh the benefits or

the responsibilities may be relegated to someone outside of the rural school. As alluded to

earlier, some rural school leaders do not spend a significant amount of time in trying to

secure funding. Reasons for this include the reliance on the person at the district level

who serves in a centralized support capacity. This reliance also gives the impression that

grant writing, as a skillset, may only need to be developed to support some of Colorado's

rural schools. This is evidenced as "Craig," purported:

> I have no grant writing experience. I wrote a small grant about 10 years ago,
> nothing significant, so I have no training in that. We, at the district office, hired a
> person; she's kind of a jack-of-all trades and one of her job descriptions is grant
> writing. She's been pretty successful with her grant writing, and so she's primarily
> the one in the district that does that.

While there may be an interest or need to gain knowledge and experience around

grants and grant writing, the lived experiences of some current rural school leaders

indicate there may not be enough time to devote to obtaining or to managing these grants

once obtained. "Craig," in his comment, indicated this activity is managed at the district

level, which for some rural and small rural districts, hiring a resource to fulfill this

function, on a part-time or less than part-time basis may not be financially or

resourcefully feasible.

Adequate Funding – A Data Anomaly. One survey respondent who indicated

their school funding was sufficient (see Table 17) to meet their current budget and

operating demands, is located near a ski resort community. The notion of sufficient

education funding in general, is not something often found in the literature and it is not an

outcome that surfaced more than once within the scope of this research. However, this

anomaly, along with respondents who cited securing additional funds was not part of

their role as a rural school leader, should lead to further research that, as an example,

explores the effects of Colorado resort communities on their local rural economies in an effort to identify similarities and differences in the development needs of Colorado's rural school leaders.

Rural School Leader's Messages to the Colorado Department of Education. Education funding emerged as a key factor that spanned and underpinned the scope of role responsibilities, role complexity and role difficulty. The extant literature also illustrates education funding to be the source of ongoing tension among Colorado inhabitants and as such, has drawn scrutiny and legal action towards the Colorado Department of Education and others. Thus, as part of this study, I asked the survey respondents and interview participants to share, as they felt comfortable, what they would like Colorado's legislators to know regarding education policy and funding. One survey respondent suggested, "Legislators should VISIT rural schools and look at what we do accomplish before they create a solution to a problem we do not have...most of the solutions forced upon us actually make the problems worse." Another respondent recommended that Colorado's Legislators "come spend a month in a rural district - dive in so you really understand the dynamics of education specifically in a rural community!" One more rural school leader, in an effort to provide exposure to the efforts and lived experiences of their faculty, recommends Colorado's Legislators, "visit rural schools to see first-hand the challenges and the dedication of these teachers - it will simply amaze you. It will also humble you to see how much personal time that is invested on behalf of educating the youth in Colorado." As discussed in chapter five, the Colorado Rural Education Council (REC) has demonstrated their efforts towards visiting a number of

Colorado's rural schools but moreover, demonstrates a commitment to Colorado's rural through the establishment of this council.

The lived experiences, as shared by some of Colorado's rural school leaders, offers both epistemological and ontological opportunities to reflect on their past and consider those leaders who hold the future. In doing so, being prepared to navigate the challenges that exists with the rural school leader role, is important to the success of both the rural school and rural communities. The following section and second theme, discusses perceptions of role preparedness in connection with current retirement timelines, perceptions of role succession, rural experience, school-leader role experience, and education. Education is further organized into perceptions of their licensure education being sufficient and insufficient along with professional development resources and opportunities.

Theme 2 - Perceptions of Role Preparedness

Asset and tension-based lived experiences have emerged throughout this research study. These lived experiences demonstrate the Colorado rural school leader role, for some, to be complex – largely the result of declining funding for education primarily due to the negative factor. Role complexities aside, some rural school leaders choose to remain in their rural school and community surroundings for reasons that stretch across their family, their commitment to the rural school and rural communities, and in some instances, their personal identity. However, despite these views, there continues to be a decline in the number of available licensed school leaders. This continued decline has implications for succession of current Colorado rural school leaders. To illustrate the

sensitivity of this problem, I introduce this section with an idea, in general, of how long some of Colorado's rural school leaders may have remaining until retirement.

Retirement Timeline and Role Succession

The point of this section is to draw attention to the importance of rural school leader role in terms of retirement timelines juxtaposed against the availability of someone within the rural school who could step into the role. Of the 49 respondents to this survey question, 19 or 38.78% indicated their time to retirement was greater than ten years; 11 or 22.45% are female and 8 or 16.33% are male. The next highest time to retirement was between three-to-five years represented by 9 or 18.37% of the respondents; 6 or 12.24% are male, and 3 or 6.12% are female. The third highest time to retirement was within three years represented by 6 or 12.24% of the respondents; 5 or 10.20% are male, and 1 or 2.04% is female. The remaining 15 or 30.61% respondents indicated they would retire within five to 10 years. The retirement timelines assumes the rural school leaders remain in their current roles giving way to learning more about Colorado's rural school leaders towards a different preparation of future rural school leader aspirants.

Role Successor Availability and Perceptions of Role Succession. As part of one survey instrument, Colorado's rural school leaders were asked if they felt they had someone who could serve as an immediate successor to their role. Illustrated in Table 24, of the 49 respondents, 31 or 63.3% respondents indicated they did have someone who could step into their role immediately, while 18 or 36.7% respondents reported the opposite.

Table 23

Perceptions of Role Succession

As rural school principal leader, do you feel you have someone who / could serve as an immediate successor to your role?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	31	63.3	63.3	63.3
	No	18	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

In order to gain awareness into what it may take for role succession to be effective for some of the rural school leaders, I asked them to provide their perspectives. In one instance, the volume of what is needed drove one survey respondent to reply with "not real sure…lots of things," to another including the broad scope of, "everything." The discourse rural school leaders use to describe their roles and the tools needed for success indicates a volume of role-related demands, which exceeds their capacity and may hinder their perceptions of self-efficacy. Connecting the lived experiences of the rural school leader to the role successor, some rural school leaders weighed in with what they wish they had for their preparation now that they have had time in their roles.

"Emily,"

> I feel like there's so much that can't be taught. I feel like there are so many experiences, as the [omitted], that you just have to kind of go through to get.

"Thom,"

> I think one of the things that I wanted in my program [was] more real life types of simulations that you can have in problem-solving…spending more time in that rather than the laws and the data and all that because it's important but the real problem is what you got to solve on a day-to-day basis.

"Scott,"

> I think regardless of rural school or other school, you know what, you have to know your job…the rural school, you have to really come across, as kids are first. [And], how does the board operate? I think rural principals need to know all of those relationships from what a Board does do to the relationship between superintendent to board and superintendent to principals. I think that's important.

"Jaxie,"

> They need to be able to realize that their day does not end at a certain time. That's been one of the most interesting things for my family. They don't always get this whole - you know, "Aren't you supposed to be done at five o'clock?" Or, you know, the day doesn't stop. And that's when I'm making my phone calls to parents because I'm trying to deal with students during the day. So, you have an extra two or three hours, minimum, a day you're just doing makeup stuff; because you want to be involved, [if you're?] trying to be good.

"Craig,"

> The stuff you learn in your classes is general, and that's fine, and that's good. But, there's a lot of school-specific things that really would tie up a first-year principal time-wise…and being on the job the same time I'm taking the classes, I think was the best way to learn.

"Lyn,"

> I think in a rural school you get run out faster than anything if you think you're going to come in and take over. The staff runs the school. We try to let them [the rural community] run the parts that they can, but the staff who's knowledgeable better be the ones who run everything.

These suggestions lean into not only a place-responsive approach but also on-the-job and/or apprentice-style development. Moreover, their collective narrative appears to suggest that educating their successor is primarily one of setting appropriate role expectations.

Perceptions of Role Preparedness

What follows is a discussion of traditional and non-traditional approaches to role preparation, which includes role socialization and professional development. As discussed in the literature, rooted in the Colorado rural narrative that is nearly a century old, a place-responsive approach to rural school leader development is nascent in some of the current rural school leader's stories. This is not to say there has been an absence of discussion about rural school leader preparation between 1918 and 2014, but this is a representation of the importance guiding a place-responsive approach of rural school leader development. Colorado's rural school leaders were asked if they felt minimally equipped to assume their rural leader role. The use of the term *minimally* when asking the question, related: (a) directly to the current rural school leader reflecting on his or her skills at the time he or she took on the rural school leader role; and (b) directly to the current rural school leader reflecting on his or her knowledge of rural and level of education at the time he or she took on the rural school leader role. Of the 49 leaders who responded to this survey question, 27 or 55.1% indicated they were not minimally equipped to take on the role, while 22 or 44.9% indicated the opposite as illustrated in Table 25.

Table 24

Perceptions of Being Minimally Equipped

When you were granted the rural school principal leader role, did you feel you were minimally equipped to take on the role?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	22	44.9	44.9	44.9
	No	27	55.1	55.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Further examination of those results against their reported education levels, revealed 24 or 48.98% respondents who felt they were *not* equipped, reported having a master's degree; 2 or 4.08% respondents indicated they had either a doctorate or Juris Doctorate; and 1 or 2.04% respondent indicated having a professional or specialized degree. However, if they felt inclined, survey participants were given multiple opportunities to add commentary throughout the survey but more specifically, as part of a more general question which they were presented towards the conclusion of the survey. As illustrated in Table 26, 43 or 87.8% of the respondents felt they had the necessary education, while 6 or 12.2% felt he or she did not possess the necessary education to be being successful in their role.

Table 25

Necessary Education to be a Rural School Principal Leader

Did you feel you had the necessary education to be successful in the rural school principal leader role?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	43	87.8	87.8	87.8
	No	6	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Both survey and interview participants were asked to elaborate, as they felt comfortable, on some of the reasons they felt they were or were not minimally equipped to undertake the rural school leader role. Their comments, organized by being minimally equipped juxtaposed against being ill-equipped, are what follows later in this section and reveals the emergence of experience over education as the dominating factor towards the rural school leader's perceptions of role preparedness.

Role Preparedness – Minimally Equipped Perceptions. Possessing rural experience, as a contributing factor, ranked highest in terms of the number of comments to support why rural school leaders felt equipped when assuming their leadership role. Second to possessing rural experience was the rural school leader's discussion of their previous administrative and classroom teacher experience. No administrative experience-related comment provided any evidence to support if their reported previous experience was within rural or non-rural contexts. To illustrate why rural school leaders felt equipped, a few of the survey comments provided by the respondents are below. "Survey respondent comments on rural experience,"

…because of my previous rural experience.

I have lived in a rural setting most of my life and understand the need to be well-rounded and skilled in many areas.

I worked in a rural school as a teacher and principal before and grew up in a small town, so I was equipped.

"Survey respondent comments on administrative or teaching experience,"

I came in with a lot of administrative experience in a variety of roles.

I had been a classroom teacher for [more than 15 years] before becoming principal. This was excellent training.

Only one respondent, during the survey and interview processes, cited their prior skills and experiences to be such that they felt overqualified for many areas of the rural school leader job, citing, "I believe my skills and experiences as a school leader in a traditional school district (as both AP [Assistant Principal] and principal) made me overqualified in many areas of the job" – an anomaly in the data. This rural school leader's statement suggests his or her perception of current rural lived experiences may not be too dissimilar from those experienced in non-rural contexts. His or her use of the *term* 'traditional' to describe the non-rural school experiences, here too, suggests that leading in a rural school for some is not too dissimilar from that of its non-rural counterparts.

    Perceptions of Traditional Preparation Programs. Regarding the lived education preparation experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders, survey and interview respondents shared some of their experiences and perceptions regarding their role preparation. What follows are not only their stories but in one instance, a rural school leader shared the story of her current principal. "Lyn," reported:

> So the [person] that is my principal now, he is very rural; grew up rural, talked rural, principal in rural, but he went through [an online] university. And his prep program, although it has a lot of strong components, it's partly because it was online, but really there was no rural hardly anything. And I just thought, well, if he hadn't been here all along and kind of learned it as he went, he would be in a world of hurt because there was no mention [of rural], unless he brought it up.

"Lyn" is not the only rural school leader who shared a similar statement. However, in his case, he elected not to continue with the preparation program due to frustration. "Thom" pointed out, "I got so frustrated …because I certainly was coming from a different point

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of view than most of the other students…" He went on to say, "I think they [the college or university] could have done more to help the individual situations...it wasn't very productive, so I didn't continue with the principal preparation program." The choice between traditional or non-traditional licensure preparation programs is an option as "Colorado state law does allow for alternative [licensure] preparation programs for principal training" (Donnell-Kay Foundation & Dolan, 2013, p. 6). In support of the alternate licensure approach, "Joe," stated: "Quite frankly, I don't know if I had gone the regular route how well I would've done. I think it often times, having that hands-on experience is always going to trump a quality classroom experience." To be clear, the practical experience "Joe" mentioned is not just a component of the alternative licensure programs. It is also a component of the traditional college and university preparation programs often obtained through internships, externships, or fieldwork. However, the effectiveness of internship did come into question as reported by one survey participant, who stated: "I also don't think my 'Internship' was very useful – I chaperoned a lot of events for the person who was overseeing my internship." While not specific to this study, this statement by one rural school leader does encourage questions and further study around the extent and effectiveness of the oversight of leader internships.

Perceptions of Sufficient Education. The notion of education serving as sufficient preparation to be successful in the rural school leader role was reported at 43 or 87.8% of the 49 survey respondents. However, 22 or 44.9% felt they were minimally equipped to assume the leadership role. This difference lends itself to the possibility that while education was sufficient and highly regarded, there are other non-education factors,

which contribute to feeling equipped to assume a rural school leadership role. In addition, 22 or 44.9% of rural school leaders who felt they were minimally equipped to assume the rural school leader role, 17 or 77.27% reported having difficulty in fulfilling their primary role obligations suggesting rural experience and education level were not primary factors in perceptions of role difficulty.

Of the high percentage of survey respondents who felt their education to be sufficient, one survey respondent, in a separate section of the survey, pointed out, "I believe I had the education to be successful (from a different state with greater rigor in the program)." The comment from the respondent who indicated their education from an out-of-state program "with greater rigor" (Survey Respondent, 2014), seemingly implies preparation programs within Colorado may not be as rigorous as those in other states.

Perceptions of Insufficient Education. As expressed previously, 27 or 55.1% of survey respondents felt they were not minimally equipped to assume the leader role. The impression of education being insufficient in preparing the rural school leader to be successful in their role was reported by 6 or 12.2% of the survey respondents. This difference lends itself to the possibility that some rural school leaders consider other factors outside of education to inform their perceptions of being equipped. One survey respondent indicated, "My principal and superintendent license programs would mention dual or shared roles, but no real concrete help." Here, the notion of a place-responsive approach to rural school leader preparation appears but it also appears to be limited in scope.

A different perspective surfaced whereby a respondent implies the detail that is covered as part of the program, may have been reduced or omitted in favor of a more high-level approach. He or she states, "I don't feel like most of my Ed leadership classes really focused on the nitty-gritty details of being a school administrator." A statement by one survey respondent indicates at least one program, is structured to encourage the notion that all schools operate similarly. The respondent cited, "My education was very generic and led me to believe that all schools worked the same way" and as both the literature and the emergent discourse and results of this study, reveals rural schools do not operate similarly.

In addition to their comments as to why they felt their education was insufficient to be successful in their role, two respondents supplied perspectives. One survey respondent remarked, "Rural leadership can't be taught; one must learn" which could be interpreted to mean rural school leadership is better suited to occur while performing the role and while in a rural context. As "Thom" purported, "most of my principal preparation has been on-the-job training" and during a moment of reflection and discussion regarding what a rural school leader development program should look like, "Scott" stated, it should look "different than a just your standard principal program of the law and budgeting all of that." A remark made by one survey respondent, asserted, "Those that come from large schools and cities with no rural experiences, tend to fail." This assertion appears to be rooted in personal observation.

However, this statement could be reconsidered from an alternative perspective. It could be stated that rural school leaders with no urban or suburban experiences may be

unsuccessful leaders in those non-rural milieus. However, some of the nuances that exist within the rural contexts may be lost on those school leaders who do not have a rural exposure, experience, and/or education. School leaders who could be prepared to lead across contexts may lose their agency, or ability to lead in rural school if their newfound skills are not put into practice. Conversely, rural school leaders who are educated to lead in non-rural contexts may lose their agency in those contexts if their newfound skills are not put into practice.

Role Socialization

In addition to having licensure-based education, rural administrative and/or teaching experience, the importance of role socialization through having a mentor and/or having an induction/transition period, was cited an essential factor in feeling equipped to assume the responsibilities of the rural school leader role. Two of the respondents to the survey, commented by saying:

> I was assigned a mentor who had been a successful administrator in a small rural district for over 30 years. His input and knowledge was invaluable.

> I also was able to spend a year transitioning with the former principal.

However, not all of Colorado's rural school leaders had the opportunity or privilege of having a mentor. The previous vignettes align well with the notion of role socialization through mentorship or role induction. Survey respondents had both positive and negative comments around their role socialization. Adverse comments included:

> I was not assigned a mentor. Other rural administrators in the area could have been asked or assigned to be a mentor, but a principal mentor program did not exist in a formal sense.

There wasn't a stepping stone position such as [Assistant Principal] AP to try out first; I went straight from classroom teacher to principal.

There was not a formal structure or assurance that my induction was complete and not without holes.

Conversely, rural school leaders within their interviews, discussed how their transition to their new role was made easier by having an experienced person who could guide them, in some cases for more than one school year. In one instance, a rural school leader and former mentor have become good friends and remained in contact. Below are a few interview comments on mentoring, role transition, and/or role induction as a benefit to add context to this particular subject.

"Joe,"

I think that the transition allowed me to learn an awful lot from a gentleman with, like I said, [more than 35] years of experience who was eager to make certain that I succeeded. It was a wonderful situation to be in.

"Emily,"

I was lucky enough to kind of have that internship, so to speak, that mentorship. And then she stayed with me ever since; we've become very good friends. I know I can call her at any time and say, "Hey, I don't know what to do in this situation, what would you do, or where could I find the answer to this?

"Lyn,"

The [person] who came before me, the [person] who mentored me to become the [rural school leader] turned into an ass in the last year. The hardest thing to do is follow somebody popular. I will make sure that doesn't happen to you.

Role socialization, role induction, role transition, internship, or mentoring – whatever you choose to label it, its importance to the perceptions of some rural school leader's feeling equipped to be successful in their role, is significant as demonstrated

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through the respondents adverse and positive comments. Leader licensure was not the factor in feeling equipped. In addition to licensure, access and availability to ongoing professional development were contributing factors to perceptions of both role success and role failure by some of Colorado's rural school leaders.

Professional Development

Availability and access to professional development opportunities and resources were another are of focus in this research study. Of the 48 survey respondents, 36 or 75% felt they had quality professional development opportunities available to them. Supporting the availability of quality professional development opportunities, one survey respondent reported:

> The increase in professional development organized through our regional BOCES, has been a great addition to the area and a wonderful example of how when small rural districts cooperate, they can pool resources and make it more efficient for all.

This comment could lead into why it is important for all of Colorado's BOCES chapters to engage in alternative licensure. Currently, 14 or 70% of the BOCES chapters do not engage in alternative licensure. Reasons for their absence of participation is not explored as part of this research study.

Further discussions with interview participants, in some instances, yielded additional positive results, as "Craig," reported: "our district has been great about professional development for principals" but in opposition he cites, "professional development for staff has been very weak." In another instance, "Emily' stated, "…I think personally, I've been very lucky *so* far as professional development goes for myself *so* far." In opposition of the 36 or 75% who feel they have quality professional

development opportunities available; 12 or 25% of the survey respondents felt otherwise. As "Jaxie" reported, "it's very difficult. In my mind, I think my boss' professional development is for me to go the conference because it's in our contract." Further, "Jaxie" cited her leader as saying, "you know, you don't always have to go to all of them" which signals, in my view, a perceived lack of value in professional development which may be a contributing factor towards why, as illustrated in Table 27, 12 or 25% of the leaders indicated opportunities were not available.

Table 26

Perceptions of Available Professional Development Opportunities

Do/did you feel you have quality professional development opportunities available to you?				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	36	75.0	75.0	75.0
	No	12	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

In terms of availability and access to these opportunities, rural school leaders were asked if they felt they had quality professional development resources available to them. Illustrated in Table 28, of the 48 participants who responded, 35 or 72.9% respondents reported having these resources available while 13 or 27.1% cited the opposite.

Table 27

Perceptions of Available Professional Development Resources

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Do/did you feel you have quality professional development resources available to you?				
Valid	Yes	35	72.9	72.9	72.9
	No	13	27.1	27.1	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

"Emily," as part of her personal, professional development, reported the opportunity was "given to me by [omitted university] when I spent that year doing those classes there; it's [nearly 250 miles]. It about a five-hour drive; it's something I paid for out-of-pocket." In one instance, a rural school leader reported incredible support by his superintendent. "Scott" stated, "Our current superintendent is very connected with CDE; so he's been able to bring some people out for those types of things to us. Don't know if that would be so easy if we were in [the plains area]. I've enjoyed being involved in some things through CDE…but is one of those things I have to be willing to drive into Denver most of the time." One participant offered a solution to his access challenges of professional development. "Joe," indicated, "you get these well-intentioned people that are half way through professional development and then they'll say, 'and when you take all the kids down to the zoo'…we don't do that. I mean, that's not a yearly trip for us because it's 200 miles away." Along with this perception that rural is similar to other non-rural areas, access to professional development for "Joe" and his teachers is a struggle and creates frustration, he stated:

> As you look at the list, and there's some stuff in Grand Junction and there's some
> stuff in Colorado Springs, in Denver and Ft. Collins. The rest of you, get on your

bikes and ride boys because we are not bringing it to you. And [CDE] has been cut back to the point where they got two people running the entire Plains and Western Slope. Yeah, that's going to work out great. Meanwhile, if you're in DPS, you walk next door.

Access to the professional development solution, that "Joe" suggested, is specific to rural professional development and in his opinion, is: "designed around the idea of almost like an institute, where we have a week or two weeks where you show up and we have the experts there, and you get to work with other rural educators on the issues that are unique to – I mean, most people don't know what to do with a class of six." Last, in relation to the availability of nearby academic resources, "Joe" states, "we don't have a local college. Hell, we don't even have one within driving distance." "Scott," also indicated:

You also do get a little isolated in the rural community from other schools and other principals. You get kind of isolated within both your own rural area but even just within your own district, there's not a lot of people to talk to.

To determine if this was still a desire, as part of the survey questions, I asked rural school leaders if having the opportunity to network and share ideas with other rural school leaders would be of interest. Of the 48 respondents, 46 or 95.8% reported this to be of great interest to them while, 2 or 4.2% indicated it would not be of interest at all. He or she indicated,

I run a [location removed] principal group that meets once a month at different schools within [nearly 100 miles] of my current school. This is an opportunity for [nearly 20] different principals to get together to discuss current issues, to vent, to ask for help and to share ideas and best practices.

Given the use of technology to increase access to educational opportunities, "Joe" made a learning style preference statement, stating: "Some of the older people just really hate it. They would rather drive an hour and forty-five minutes than try to communicate

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over a computer." For many rural school leaders and teachers alike, professional development may be considered more of a networking or perhaps a social opportunity where learning can be achieved through in-person interaction.

Rural School Leader's Messages to Rural School Leader Aspirants

Considering the current and past lived experiences in connection with the future of rural school leadership, and as these and other rural school leaders make their way towards role departure through whatever means (i.e., retirement, leaving education for a new field, etc.), I asked the rural school leaders if they had a message or advice they would like to pass along to those who may be thinking of or actively seeking school leadership in a rural school; intentional or as a short-term solution. What follows are a few of those messages.

"Lyn,"

> Listening, especially when you're coming into a new place, you need to remember that it's their school, especially those people that have been there longer. They might not do things how you like it, but they're very invested, and especially in a small community, that, if you don't at least make them know that you are listening to them and taking their opinions, they'll run you out faster than anything.

"Joe,"

> [You] better have spent some time in a rural school. You're in for a hell of a culture shock [and] someone who is very concrete and sequential should not plan on a career in rural [school] administration.

"Emily,"

> If you can just talk yourself into sitting and listening, that's what most people want. They don't always need an answer; they just need someone to hear them.

"Thom,"

> Being able to listen to people and hear what they're saying and give them a sense that they've understood, sometimes I think it's, I don't know if it's more important in a rural school, but because the people are so involved, in a way I think it is more important. They have to feel like they have ownership of the school.

"Scott,"

> You have to know your job. You've got to know all those basic things. The rural school, you have to really come across, as kids are first. But know who my kid is. That's the most important thing.

"Jaxie,"

> Networking is a key thing.

Another piece of advice surfaced that offered some recommendations to those rural school leader aspirants who may be thinking about rural as a short or long-term solution. "Lyn" stated, "if you think you want to be rural, you need to go out in a rural school for a while, even if it's just like a student-teaching kind of experience where you get a feel for there is no place to go at lunch." However, as specified earlier, challenges may exist which prevent authentic assimilation to the rural culture for those who may choose, as "Lyn" stated, "to *be* rural." One of the issues is the rural community accepting the person as rural and removing the identity of being considered an outsider. As earlier illustrated, for some female rural school leaders, this has never been or may never diminish. Their statements also suggests a long-term commitment to rural. Which, in some instances appears to be non-existent as some faculty and school leaders treat rural as a place to stay for only a short time while gaining professional experience.

Overall, the findings that emerged from this study can be organized into: (a) lived experiences among some of Colorado's rural school leaders can be perceived as asset-

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based and tensions or challenges found within those lived experiences; (b) some rural school leaders perceive the number of role responsibilities are contributing factors to role complexity and difficulty in fulfilling primary role obligations but did not emerge as a direct contributor to role departure; (c) some rural school leaders, despite having opportunities to delegate some of their administrative role responsibilities, elect not to delegate which may contribute to their adverse perceptions of not only their role, but also their self-efficacy; (d) Colorado rural contexts should not be assumed as common as their respective nuances (e.g., education funding, access to educational opportunities) may differ between rural community to rural community; (e) some rural school leaders perceive rural, as a context within which to live and work, contains an inherent power that should be acknowledged and respected by school leaders; and (f) while some of Colorado's rural school leaders reported not feeling minimally equipped to perform their rural school leader role at the time he or she accepted the role, both level of education and rural experience were not primary factors in perceptions of role difficulty.

Summary of Discoveries

Role complexity was described through parameters, which included understanding how many rural school leaders have role responsibilities that extended beyond those described as administrative, those who serve in a dual role, and by understanding how many of Colorado's rural school leaders lead more than one rural schools. The count and scope of responsibilities, connected with some rural school leader roles, contributed to the rural school leader's perceptions of role complexity and in some instances, their perceptions of role difficulty. Role responsibilities, as shared by some

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survey and interview respondents, informed the notion that school leader role demands, like extant literature states, is excessive and contributes to some rural school leaders reporting have difficulty fulfilling their primary role obligations.

Role complexity and role fulfillment difficulty appear, in part, to be a result of role demands that were not delegated to other school personnel. In some instances, access to additional school personnel were not available due to limited education funding or it was a personal choice by the rural school leader to retain their administrative responsibilities in an effort to mitigate overextending other faculty and/or staff personnel. Education funding was identified as a primary contributing factor underpinning the rural school leader's perceptions of role complexity, role difficulty, and in two instances, reasons for role departure. The effects of inadequate education funding in some rural districts, were identified as the inability to purchase textbooks, provide reasonable and customary raises to teachers, funding capital improvement projects, and out-of-pocket spending by some rural school leaders and teachers.

Chapter Summary

The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders with the objective of explicating factors embedded within their lived experiences towards, where appropriate, an evolution of principal preparation programs; to lay the foundation for later research study inquiries; to determine if the phenomenon being observed may be expounded upon by a current theory; and to conclude if lived experiences contain answers towards a resolution of the two problems which informed this study. This exploratory approach yielded two primary themes with supporting points

that were presented within this chapter. These emergent themes include: (a) the scope and profundity of the rural school leader role as illustrated by some of Colorado's rural school leaders, and (b) rural school leader perceptions of role preparedness.

This chapter was organized by two emergent themes and with it, the supporting qualitative and quantitative data collected from the survey and interview participants, illustrated asset-based lived experiences and tensions or challenges found within those lived experiences. In some instances, only the asset-based lived experiences or only the tensions or challenges found within those lived experiences materialized in discussions and in survey instruments. This is not to say or imply the availability of counter experiences among Colorado's rural school leaders were not present, just their omission is simply a function of the small number of participants who participated in the study in comparison with the total population of rural school leaders in Colorado. Regardless of the challenges some rural school leaders face as part of their day-to-day roles, the decision to live and/or work in a rural community were reported as intentional for some and happenstance for others. However, despite how each of the rural school leaders found their way into the rural school and/or rural communities of Colorado, the common factor among them for staying appears to be intentional.

This intentionality for some was described as an ongoing and seemingly deliberate commitment to the rural school and rural community despite the notions of excessive role responsibilities and perceptions of role complexities and role fulfillment difficulties. What follows in the next and final chapter is my discussion of the findings within the tenets of the chosen conceptual framework along with implications for higher

education policy, practices, and implications for further inquiry. The conceptual

framework is used as an attempt to examine the emergent themes and findings towards

gaining awareness of how Colorado's rural school leaders interact with and make

meaning in rural contexts. In addition, I address the research question and problems that

guided this research.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study's discoveries revealed numerous access points to support both the significance of and attention to Colorado's rural school leaders lived experiences. However, it is acknowledged that these discoveries, which emerged as part of this exploratory study may also exist in non-rural contexts. Further, while this study was guided by an attention on Colorado's rural school leaders, some of the emergent discoveries may also extend to teachers and staff both in rural and non-rural contexts as well as states outside of Colorado.

The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders with the objective of explicating factors embedded within their lived experiences towards, where appropriate, an evolution of principal preparation programs; to lay the foundation for later research study inquiries; to determine if the phenomenon being observed may be expounded upon by a current theory; and to conclude if lived experiences contain answers towards a resolution of the two problems which informed this study. The problems guiding this research study were; (a) the decline in the availability of education funding; and (b) the decline in availability of rural-prepared leaders for Colorado's rural schools. Thus, the research question that guided this exploration was, how can the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders inform the evolution of principal preparation programs? The research question is addressed

within the discussion of this study's discoveries and through the selected conceptual framework's tenets.

The conceptual framework, more broadly examined within the literature review chapter and according to researchers Brown, Jeanes, and Cutter-Mackenzie (2014), "considers connections, relationships and consequences that are not often given importance in traditional approaches to education" (p. 26). These socioecological factors entrenched within the Social Ecology as Education (Brown, Jeanes, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014) conceptual framework, are 1) "lived experience; 2) place; 3) experiential pedagogies; and 4) agency and participation" (p. 27). The purpose for using this framework, as discussed in a previous chapter, is that rural is described as being socially constructed and its relevant ecologies refers to the "immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and dynamic cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact" (Barnett & Casper, 2001, p. 465). Therefore, relative to the framework, this study was designed to capture and privilege the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders towards a new or perhaps an evolved ontological approach to current and/or future rural school leader preparation that is epistemologically informed.

Summary of Discoveries - Restated

The discoveries that emerged from this study are organized into: (a) lived experiences among some of Colorado's rural school leaders can be perceived as asset-based joined with tensions found within those lived experiences; (b) some rural school leaders perceive the number of role responsibilities are contributing factors to role

complexity and difficulty in fulfilling primary role obligations but did not emerge as a

direct contributor to role departure; (c) some rural school leaders, despite having

opportunities to delegate some of their administrative role responsibilities, elect not to

delegate which may contribute to their adverse perceptions of not only their role, but also

their self-efficacy; (d) Colorado rural contexts should not be assumed as common as their

respective nuances (e.g., education funding, access to educational opportunities) may

differ between rural community to rural community; (e) some rural school leaders

perceive rural, as a context within which to live and work, contains an inherent power

that should be acknowledged and respected by school leaders; and (f) while some of

Colorado's rural school leaders reported not feeling minimally equipped to perform their

rural school leader role at the time he or she accepted the role, both level of education and

rural experience were not primary factors in perceptions of role difficulty.

Discussion

Lived Experiences

Recalling from chapter three, the definition of lived experience "is a

representation and understanding of choices and options and how those factors influence

one's perception of knowledge" (Boylorn, 2008, p. 1) and is "highly personal and

subjective" (Brown, Jeanes, Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014, p. 28). Rural school leaders who

may not have prior experience or exposure to rural may be faced with how to make

meaning of the knowledge they acquire about and within their rural environment. The

rural school leader's ability to make meaning is rooted in their "social, cultural, and

historical background" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 29) and if their experiences or exposure to

rural has been limited or even non-existent, meaning making may be restricted to only those experiences to which they most identify giving way to opportunity for knowledge contradiction and/or rejection (Ryan & Rossi, 2008).

During the course of this study, more than one rural school leader participant directly stated or in some instances, alluded to the importance of having some level of rural experience in order to make meaning as he or she interacts with and within their specific rural context. Each of the interview participants expressed their awareness of the social, cultural, and historical legacies. However, an awareness of these areas does not mean an implied or inherent agreement by the rural school leader. Of the 40 survey respondents, only 16 or 40% reported they shared the social and/or culture position of the rural community. Based on the theory, this could demonstrate the rural school leader's ability to connect to the social and cultural positions of the rural community is rooted in their exposure to and engagement with rural experiences. Specific to community history, "Thom" indicated:

> I was very cognizant of the history of the community...so I am very; I was very cognizant of how important that type of thing was for the community, commercially as well as just culturally. I think some principals concentrate a lot on the academics, and some people probably would criticize me for not focusing more on that, but I thought it was very important too for the kids' sense of identity, as well as a community sense of support for the school.

Therefore, relative to the emergent findings, sharing the lived experiences of the current rural school leaders may inform the decision-making of rural school leader aspirants.

Specific to Colorado, according to Hirsch and Goff (2002), "in focus groups of Colorado principals, perceptions constantly emerged that principal-preparation faculty are distant from the actual pressures of the principalship" (p. 23). Nearly twenty-six years

earlier, Grippin, Sarachan-Deily, Medved and Lyon (1985), reported a similar finding, not specific to Colorado, but suggesting, "rural educators are more aware of special characteristics needed in rural areas than college faculty" (p. 149). The results of this research study confirm the literature reported in 1985, in 2002, and in 2005 by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL). Ultimately, Colorado's rural school leaders indicated a rural-specific preparation program or, at a minimum, inclusion of some rural contexts within the course curriculum would be helpful.

Some of the rural school leader respondents, while indicating education level and experiences with rural did not directly contribute to their feelings of being ill-equipped when they accepted their role, the count and scope of their role responsibilities, perceptions of reason for role complexity and role difficulty, resulted in the content recommendations when preparing future leaders. As one survey respondent reported, "My education was very generic and led me to believe that all schools worked the same way." Supported by the extant literature and the emergent discourse resulting from this study, reveals rural schools do not operate similarly. Awareness and acceptance that differences do exist between rural communities, may contribute to the evolution of education funding and access to education opportunities that some rural school leaders discussed as factors in their perceptions of role complexity, role difficulty, and in one instance, role departure.

The rural school, as Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) purport, is the foundation of the rural community - a symbol of power and stability essential to the rural community's survival. Supporting this notion, Miller (1995) suggests rural schools, not unlike their

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past roles, serve as a "cultural center in the community where athletics, drama programs, music, and other social activities play a vital part in community life and identity" (p. 164). Other rural researchers, along with grassroots organizations who advocate for rural, firmly assert a similar ideology reporting rural schools are the foundational institution that holds together the rural community (Center for Rural Affairs, 2013; Flora & Flora, 2008; Lyson, 2002). Thus, the rural school leader role takes on a more complex dimension. If the rural school leader should fail in his or her role, the adverse effects of this failure are likely to cause a ripple effect that begins with the rural school community (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) and extends to the rural community – resulting in not only the possible extinction of the rural community, but also the individual rural school and rural community cultures. By extension, the extinction of the rural community further leaves those undeveloped rural identities orphaned and in search of new and perhaps similar places and spaces to continue development.

Places and Spaces

As Merrifield (1993) suggested through his discussion, place and space interact to create another dimension with which to understand the how humans interact with and within their environment. As one of the four tenets within the Social Ecology as Education conceptual framework, "place is essential to education because it provides researchers and practitioners with a concrete focus for cultural study" (Gruenewald, 2010, p. 143) and within rural, "placed-based advocates contend that rural students are deeply tied to locality by sense of place" (Azano, 2011, p. 1). Alternatively, recent rural teacher-related literature by Azano and Stewart (2015), suggested that, "having grown up

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in a rural community inherently prepares a future teacher for success in a rural school. Those experiences, however, can serve as blinders" (p. 2). Striking a balance between rural and non-rural contexts encourages the school leader and school leader aspirant's dominant knowledge to be challenged thus opening an opportunity towards a greater awareness of each other's contexts.

The connection between the lived experiences shared by some of Colorado's rural school leaders and the significance of their respective rural places and spaces emerged across the each of the interview participants. Speaking only to the interview participants and one survey participant, each leader had experience both in and outside of rural communities. "Lyn" and "Scott" discussed their transition to rural from urban and suburban communities respectively indicating they felt ill-equipped to take on the leader role while one survey participant indicated she felt overqualified when stepping into the role. Relative to rural places and spaces, both the literature and comments from study participants revealed rural school leaders have onerous role demands as one respondent reported, "flexibility, strong with ethics, communication, willing to wear many hats, work independently", "a rural school principal requires flexibility, adaptability, organization, and the ability to multi-task." As discussed in the literature, the role of the rural school leader is complex in nature and has a remarkable amount of power and responsibility metaphorically placed on his or her shoulders.

This complexity is translated and traced back to several important leader affected areas. DeRuyck (2005) asserted "the challenges rural principals face stem from a number of sources, including principal preparedness and supply, principal professional

development, school-based challenges, and community-related challenges" (p. 4). In rural

contexts, the role of the school leader, not unlike its non-rural counterparts, is

multifaceted and it is difficult, if not impossible for a school leader to assume his/her

primary role as instructional leader (Lynch, 2012); which has been the assumed role since

the mid-1980's (Beck & Murphy, 1993). The difficulties occur when there is often not

enough time during the course of a workday to balance tasks associated with the primary

role and the far-reaching non-administrative tasks. However, regardless of the tasks they

complete or the roles they assume, rural school leaders, above all else, remain faced with

meeting the standards and obligations associated with federal, state, and local (district)

legislation.

Experiential Pedagogies

Brown, Jeanes, and Cutter-Mackenzie (2014) identified a set of socioecological

philosophies in which experiential pedagogies can be understood. The first is recognizing

experiences are constant simplified as "past experiences are always connected to future

experiences" (p. 35); the second, being "the importance of the teacher understanding the

lived experiences, spaces and places of the classrooms" (p. 35); and third, "experience

and reflection are integrally linked and educators need to both craft rich experiences and

foster a deep examination of how the experiences are reflected upon" (p. 36). In 2005,

IEL further reported, "a serious disconnect between school leadership training provided

in university programs and courses and what happens in [rural] schools" (p. 4). If this gap

were closed or even narrowing, Colorado's rural school leaders, may report a much

higher percentage towards perceptions of preparedness where education, aligned with

experience, would be a leading reason, as compared to the 27 or 55.1% who felt they were not as prepared due to their education content and not education levels.

The inherent power of places, spaces, and the rural school leaders lived experiences, gives strength to pedagogy and agency. Drawing on power of individual places, spaces, along with the lived experiences to differently prepare rural school leaders, encourages greater opportunities for his or her role success and long-term sustainability. In terms of access, Preston, Jakubiec, Kooymans (2013) and Southworth (2004), determined that rural school leaders were more secluded from leader preparation programs and did not have easy access to fellow school leaders as compared to their non-rural counterparts. Access to leader preparation is a significant issue for some Colorado rural school leaders. Here, at the expense of the rural school leader's preparation and by extension, his or her agency, there are missed opportunities by universities, colleges, and organizations who provide school-leader preparation programs, to do so in a way that is place and space-critical. For example, a university who has a non-rural tailored program but who enrolls rural school leaders or rural school leader aspirants, may inadequately prepare him or her for the demands they will likely encounter, further resulting in adverse effects on the rural school community and perhaps, on a larger scale, the rural community. Some of these adverse effects may include, as reported previously, role confusion, role frustration and eventual, role departure.

Connecting the needs of their students to the courses offered and to the results of this and other research studies, may perhaps offer a pioneering level of insight into rural school leader preparation – specific to that rural area. As the literature states (Chalker,

1999; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2005; Tieken, 2014; White & Corbett, 2014) and as I have demonstrated through the results discussed as role responsibilities and role preparation needs in the prior chapter, the nuances of rural, at least in some areas of Colorado, are somewhat dissimilar among rural areas. This is not to say there are not commonalities between and among rural areas, but it is to say the differences that do exist that should be considered in rural school leader preparation.

Agency and Participation

Agency, according to Biesta and Tedder (2006), has been understood as "an educational aim, an educational ideal and as the desired outcome of educational processes" (p. 5). Translated to a socioecological definition, agency marks a person's "capacity to act independently and make free choices" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 38). Preparation of rural school leaders does not end with his or her formal role preparation. Ongoing education, in terms of professional development, as Brown et.al (2014) suggests that it "needs to be ongoing, and relate specifically to the setting and community environment in which the individual is located" (p. 40). This environment-specific education prepares individuals like rural school principal leaders: 1) with the essential "tools to gain agentive capacity" (p. 40) by acknowledging and educating for the multiple socio-ecological dimensions to increase empowerment; and 2) to achieve an idealized outcome whereby those with agency actively take part in making critical decisions (Brown et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2007).

Professional development opportunities are not reasonably and adequately accessible and do not adequately attend to the nuanced rural contexts. This issue alone

has resulted in at least one Colorado rural school leader transitioning from a rural to a non-rural context for, in part, increased professional development opportunities. This is not surprising as a prior study reported that "only half of [Colorado] districts that serve fewer than 300 students, offer professional development for school leaders, compared to all districts with more than 25,000 pupils" (Hirsch & Groff, 2002, p. 69). However, twelve years have passed and what was reported in 2002 compared to what is being reported by rural school leaders in 2014, has not change for some of Colorado's rural areas. The issue of deficient superintendent and/or principal professional development opportunities also surfaced in 2011 by Fox and Van Sant in their report to CDE.

The professional development of current rural school leaders and the preparation of future rural school leader aspirants is not to be casually or carelessly considered. In 2005, IEL asserted, "the education of a [rural] school leader never stops. So, in addition to preparing new leaders, preparation programs also must provide continuing support for established principals and superintendents" (p. 2). More recent research indicates, "rural principals need unique forms of leadership development for their rural circumstance" (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013, p. 4). The importance of their preparation, socialization, and professional development, as previously discussed, has been the subject and result of a number of rural-centric studies both in and out of Colorado. However, a growing concern is emerging whereby some Colorado's rural school leaders are questioning their choice to continue in the role and some have already made the decision to leave. Regardless of how, role departure is imminent. Nearly 13% of the respondents

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indicated they are within three years of retirement and in at least one instance, the lack of interest in the rural school leader role was subject to nothing more than the teachers were happy being teachers (Interviewee, 2014). However, this is not always the case. As Howley, Andrianaivo, and Perry (2005) report, "many educators are reluctant to pursue administrative positions because of the demands of the job, the increased pressure to show 'results,' and the inadequate remuneration" (p. 758). This notion is reasonably clear in Colorado, whereby the number of enrollments into the school- leader licensure programs have and continue to decline. Assuming the rural school leaders remain in their current roles, there exists a slim window of opportunity to learn more about Colorado's rural school leaders towards a different approach to preparation of future rural school leader aspirants. However, the economics of supply and demand will come into focus, if it has not already for some rural schools, as even school leader recruitment may only result in a short-term solution.

<center>**Implications**</center>

This section holds some of the possible implications resulting from this study's discoveries. These implications include the evolution of federal, state, and institutional policies; implications for evolution of practice; and guide recommendations for further inquiry on rural school leader preparation – both in and out of Colorado. The research design and the number of study participants again, does not lend itself to sweeping generalizations to all Colorado rural schools nor does it support sweeping generalizations to rural schools in other states. However, I do contend these discoveries lend themselves towards opportunities for rural and non-rural focused researchers and policymakers to

(re)consider their scope and effects of both their research and political agendas to be more intra- and inter-contextual. In addition, school-leader preparation practitioners also have an opportunity to (re)consider the scope, delivery, geographic location, and general effects of their preparation programs as also being more intra- and inter-contextual.

Preparation of rural school leaders, echoing other rural researchers, does not end with his or her formal role preparation. Ongoing education, as Brown et.al (2014) suggests that it "needs to be ongoing, and relate specifically to the setting and community environment in which the individual is located" (p. 40). While these researchers refer to this place and space-focused education in terms of professional development, there is consideration of place and space-focus education in terms of initial school leader preparation. Rural students are profoundly connected to their communities and authors posit the idea that "place-based education seeks to ground learning in local phenomena and students' lived experience" (Smith, 2002, p. 586). Generally considered, the use of Gieryn's (2000) approach to place and space within the scope of the rural context, as discussed in a previous chapter is operationalized as a contextual function of the rural school and the rural community. In short, a rural context can be considered as both place *and* space and is not subject to or limited by definitional or geographic boundaries.

Connecting an inter- and intra-contextual (re)consideration of rural to the issues that assisted in informing this research, it is important to link both to those who live and/or work in rural settings. Chalker (1999) stated, "Rural schools and communities have strengths that should be part of the prescription for remedying problems and directing changes in rural education" (p. 13). These "changes in rural education" as

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Chalker (1999, p. 13) mentions, may occur from either asset or deficit positions. As indicated in this and the prior chapter, the lived experiences of some of Colorado's rural school leaders contained both positive (asset) and negative (deficit) aspects. Thus, guiding this particular section is a limitation inherent within objectives of qualitative research. The objective of qualitative research is not to generalize the discoveries to the larger population, but to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied and to confirm quantitative data with qualitative experiences (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2007). As a result, identifying implications for institutional policy are carefully considered and cautiously identified.

Federal and State Policy Implications

Federal and state education funding support can have an influence on the enthusiasm of current rural school leaders and future rural school leader aspirants. Some of the participants in this research frequently linked their existing role challenges to long-term, deficient education funding practices at both the state and federal levels. During the course of this research study, CDE announced its plans for initiative expansion "aimed at supporting and enhancing educational opportunities for schools and students throughout rural Colorado" (p. 1). This expansion included five new program initiatives: (a) improving teacher quality grants at a cost of $633,000; (b) beginning roundtable meetings to support the development of the educator pipeline; (c) beginning concurrent enrollment professional development to increase teacher credentialing; (d) expanding career exploration through Colorado GEAR UP, a program to support first-time college families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds; and (e) funding and the Colorado Opportunity

Scholarship Initiative, awarding approximately 11.33% or $3.4 million of the $30 million in allocated grant funds to the 2015 rural initiative. While this increase in education funding for rural Colorado education is notable, it is reported as only a one-time increase ("The State of Colorado, 2015," para. 98) for the 2015-2016 school year. Thus, I contend federal and state education policymakers should attend to more flexible and sustainable solutions that should begin with state and federal policymakers (re)considering the effects of presently enacted education policies and future-proposed education policies within the state's rural contexts.

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) published a report (2005) that focused on rural school leader preparation. The report stated, "there is a need for school district leaders and their community partners to inform state and local policy makers about both the shortage of money and leaders for rural schools" (p. 7). Further and more recently, rural researchers asserted, "the diversity of rural America creates challenges for education policy: policy in rural communities must be nimble enough to meet the distinct needs of the unique populations within the district" (Johnson, Mitchel & Rotherham, 2014, p. 5). One way in which this can happen, is through increased rural-focused research. This research should be designed and carried out as a collaborative study between the Colorado Department of Education and interested colleges and universities. Funded by the state and by relevant grants, when and where possible, CDE may learn more about the relationships that may or may not exist between the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders and enacted education policies. Further, participating

colleges and universities may also learn how to (re)consider their school leader

preparation programs in a manner that attends to the nuanced rural school leadership.

Institutional Policy Implications

A private university in Colorado recently demonstrated a more focused

commitment to rural school leadership preparation by creating a program that attends to

the state's core preparation requirements and a place-based pedagogy. However, attention

by one university will not address the current decline in school leaders who are prepared

to lead schools located in rural contexts. It is vital for institutional leaders to consider the

significance of their approach to school-leader preparation. Development of purposeful

curriculum that encourages inter- and intra-contextual exposure among rural and non-

rural contexts, presents opportunity for school leader aspirants to be well-informed about

the similarities and differences that do exist among some of Colorado's rural schools.

It is imperative that institutional leaders and their respective faculty recognize the

importance of their approach to school leader preparation, in part, as an

acknowledgement of the significance of rural but also to the students who participate in

their preparation programs who may one day lead a rural school or schools. One way this

can happen, as an example, is establishing a culture of rural awareness, where

appropriate, in all university teacher and leader education programs. Evaluating student

populations against geographic backdrops to ensure program structures meets the

demands of the student and encourages a culture of action. Concerning higher education

research and policy implications, it is critical to the future of rural school leader's success

that research continues towards learning more about Colorado's rural school leaders and

by extension, rural school leaders across the nation. As rural-focused researchers, we can continue to encourage sustainable attention to rural through a: (a) culture of rural awareness across federal, state, and university entities; (b) continued and consistent approach that rural is meaningful; and (c) continued and consistent approach that rural, in many aspects, may not be not always equal to its non-rural counterparts.

Colleges and universities can purposefully add faculty researchers whose rural research agendas complement the university's research agendas and overall mission. Universities and colleges who have students from rural schools in any of their programs, and/or who are in or are closely located to rural areas, are encouraged to support this approach. Without adequate and sustainable attention to rural, higher education institutions give credibility to Howley's (2001) earlier claim, that:

> Many institutions with reputations less bright than those of elite schools, would gladly sell out their host communities in rural areas in order to lay their hands on a fraction of the soft money that flows so easily downhill to places like Stanford and Harvard. Higher Education institutions have global reputations to build or maintain, and they don't really want to be seen with their hick neighbors, much less be working with them. (p. 11)

Another implication for higher education is to re-imagine rural school leadership preparation as one that begins with teacher preparation or perhaps as a function of a formal professional development program. Some of Colorado's rural school leaders indicated, their perceptions of being equipped to navigate the rural school leader role and be successful, was often rooted in classroom experience. The evolution of rural school leader preparation and the increase in the rural school leader pipeline may have a link to teacher preparation. Additional exploration of the literature and discussions with rural school leaders, could offer some insight to this idea.

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Practice Implications

The discoveries from this study reveal implications for practice within higher education institutions. Participants discussed increased access to educational opportunities and an increased opportunity for open dialogue with the Colorado Department of Education as ways in which perceptions of their roles may improve. In addition, the discoveries from this study lean into the possibility of a rural typology that informs a flexible, scalable, and place-responsive leader preparation model. Thus, what follows is a brief discussion of these implications.

Satellite and Mobile Campuses. Colorado's rural school leaders lived experiences, as an example, provide information that Colorado's colleges and universities can explore and further juxtapose the findings against how they attend to school leader preparation, both in rural and non-rural contexts. Some recommendations towards how institutions of higher education can respond to the findings from this research include the intentional development and deployment of a place-responsive approach to rural school leader preparation. As an example, small satellite or campus locations could be placed in strategic locations throughout the state to support both rural and small rural districts. Moreover, for those rural areas that are remote and exceed a pre-determined distance, employ a mobile campus that travels to the local rural district to delivery courses. In doing so, we can attend to distance-related challenges; learner's particular learning styles, and provide a partnership between a higher education institution and the rural community.

Improved Communications and Connections with Colorado's Rural. Another

area that can be considered is the connection between rural school districts and

information concerning funding, partnerships, collaboration, professional development

just to name a few. One way in which this can happen is through the creation of rural

school leader listserv, managed by a central source, but used by and among rural school

districts, universities, colleges, organizations, foundations, rural advocates, state

education leaders and more. As an example, a remote rural school in the southeast part of

Colorado may be able to communicate with a rural school leader across the state in the

northwest corner regarding the use of Smartboard technology, borrowing textbooks, and

other subjects. The Colorado Department of Education can communicate new grant and

other funding opportunities that have been recently included on their website. Given the

role demands on the rural school leader, make it easier for them to obtain information.

In addition, I advocate for a Rural Education Summit. Grinnell College located in

Iowa hosts an annual Rural Education Summit each April. This past April, the summit

program summary was as follows:

> Grinnell's Rural Education Summit is a two-day conference exploring contemporary
> issues and challenges facing K-12 rural schools. Session will cover topics such as the
> needs of minority students in rural schools, the costs and benefits of school
> consolidation, working with gifted and talented students in rural schools, learning and
> teaching in an Indian Settlement School, and helping students with disabilities
> succeed at rural schools. The Keynote Lecture on Friday, April 4th at 4:15 PM will be
> given by Dr. Kai Schafft, Director of Penn State University's Center on Rural
> Education and Communities. This event is open to college students, K-12 teachers,
> and education-faculty. (Grinnell College, 2015, para. 1)

Registration fees ranged in price from twenty to fifty dollars and accommodations were modest and affordable. Here too, this summit is way to increase exposure to rural and to encourage networking, and knowledge sharing.

Rural School-Leader Preparation and Professional Development Model

The data from this research in connection with the literature leads me to the possibility that the design and deployment of a flexible, scalable, and place-responsive rural school leader preparation model is conceivable. Factors affecting role responsibilities, role complexity, and role departure may have implications on role preparation opportunities considered within the notion of a rural typology. As an example, demographics such as population count, age, ethnicity, race, and gender distribution, district proximity to non-rural contexts and resort communities, funding amounts provided by the State, the community and perhaps other sources, to name a few, contribute to a better understanding of role responsibilities, role complexity, and role frustration and/or role departure within Colorado's rural school districts that have less than 500 students and are at or beyond 20 miles from suburban or urban communities.

Education policies, as factors effecting role responsibilities, role complexity, role frustration, and role departure could also be added to the model. As it relates to education funding policies, some of Colorado's rural school leaders remain within their roles out of a sense of duty underpinned by the hope that one day soon, someone in power in Colorado will acknowledge the existence and importance of rural, in general. Tieken (2014) reported "a long, slow conflict simmers between local, rural communities and an urban-focused state: the state acts on behalf of its cities, its urban-centric policies [to]

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further urban-centric objectives, and, in process, rural schools are improved out of existence" (p. 186). In addition, it is not just the state that appears to be urban-focused. It is also the universities, colleges, and those organizations who offer traditional and/or alternative school-leader licensure programs.

While these entities have developed preparation programs to meet federal and state requirements, most have done so without considering their rural neighbors. Bruininks (2005) and Stinson (1989) share a common vision regarding how rural communities are viewed. Ideally, the rural community would be viewed as a "spatially separated neighborhood" (Bruininks, 20015, p. 10) as compared to an isolated place, separate from the benefits, amenities, and yields of a non-rural communities.

Recalling James Baldwin, an American novelist and a literary voice in the era of civil rights activism in the 1950's and 60's, wrote "the American ideal is, after all, that everyone should be as much alike as possible" (Baldwin, 1984, p. 65). By not including rural as a consideration within Colorado's education funding policies, therein lies an impression that standardization, as an outcome of exclusion, may force Colorado's rural to conform to non-rural contexts. Thus, this model, as based on numerous and aforementioned factors and perhaps other factors, may provide greater insight into the rural school leader preparation and professional development needs as it relates to a particular rural context or perhaps intersection contexts. This idea requires additional exploration to determine its viability.

Conceptual Framework Implications

The structure of the original Social Ecology as Education (Brown, Jeanes, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014) conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 4, denies space as a part of place and denies the interactions and influences between socio-ecological relationships. The definition states the framework construct "considers connections, relationships, and consequences that are not often given importance in traditional approaches to education" (p. 26). In chapter 3, I provided explanations for the modification of this framework to one that considers space as a relational element to place. To reiterate, I modified the original structure to illustrate the known tenets as being nested (see Figure 4 in chapter 3) and less segregated from each other. This change was made to differently demonstrate the framework's definition towards a more clear illustration of the relationships that could exist between the frameworks tenets.

However, the results of my research calls for the consideration of a new social-ecological conceptual framework. Reason being, there were missing elements in the original framework. These missing elements include the effects of influence and the possibility of numerous ecological contexts. Thus, the evolution of a new conceptual framework with which to examine school-leader lived experiences is formed (see Figure 6.).

Figure 6. Social Ecology in School Leader Preparation
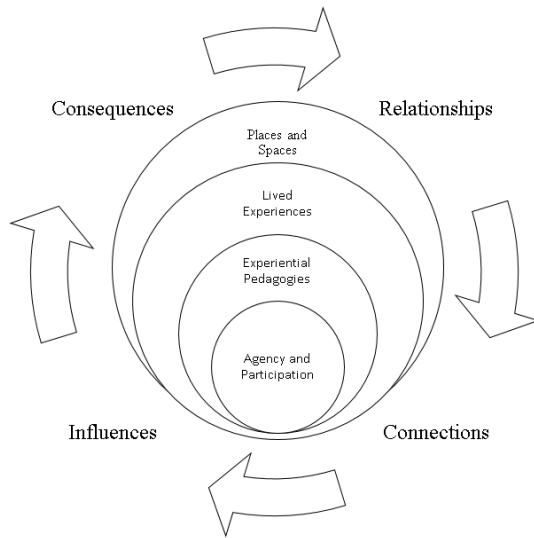
The new conceptual framework term, *Social Ecology in School Leader Preparation* considers the connections, relationships, influences, and consequences within traditional and alternative approaches to school-leader education in both rural and non-rural contexts. This framework's key tenets include places *and* spaces, lived experiences, experiential pedagogies, and agency and participation. This framework has implications for policy, research, and practice as its construct privileges the lived experiences of the rural school leader. Moreover, it offers a lens through which understanding the nuanced complexities of the rural school leader role is substantive and more profound. To determine its viability, the new conceptual framework will need to be tested in other rural school leader research studies.

Protective Leadership

During the course of this research, a number of rural school leaders indicated the primary reasons for rural school leaders retaining as much of the work as possible, at the risk of role burnout, may be rooted in staff and faculty happiness, retention, and

protection. Thus, an appearance of a leadership theory, termed *protective leadership*, seems to be one that has yet to surface among published education literature. However, it is noted that a blog post by Mickey (2006), discusses protective leadership. He or she suggests, "[the] most essential aspect of leadership is protecting those you lead" (para. 6), which I would agree, is a key tenet of this leadership style. Further investigation, reveals a self-protective leadership style that is also in existence and has conflicting tenets. According to Aylsworth (2013), the self-protective leadership style is "is about ensuring individual and/or group safety and security [but], it encompasses being status-conscious, self-centered, conflict-inducing, procedural and face-saving" (para. 1).

Arguably, the style tenets of self-protective leadership, offered by Aylsworth (2013), do not appear protective and do not reflect the actions of some Colorado rural school leaders. Thus, additional research is suggested regarding this type of leadership style whereby rural and non-rural school leaders, regardless of gender, accept additional role responsibilities often at their own personal expense. In doing so, he or she perceives that in some way they are protecting the happiness and retention of faculty, staff, and by extension, students. The outcome of this leadership demonstrates aspects that lean toward preserving the integrity of classroom education and may have further implications towards the protection of the rural community – recalling some of Colorado's rural school leaders indicated their role included both community welfare and responsibility.

Recommendations for Further Inquiry

The findings resulting from this study have several recommendations for further inquiry vis-à-vis rural school leader development. However, no generalizations emerge as

this was an exploratory study that did not have participation by all of Colorado's rural school leaders, and the objective of qualitative research, in general, is not to generalize the findings to the larger population, but to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied and to confirm quantitative data with qualitative experience (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2007). Moreover, replicating this study in non-rural contexts (i.e., suburban, urban), knowing the limitations associated with the qualitative research (Bryman 2012; Creswell, 2007), could determine whether the emergent findings are distinctively rural. Additional research is encouraged across a number of areas that appeared during the course of this exploration. By conducting this additional research, current and future rural school leader aspirants, in the long term, may be provided with more precise, place-specific role preparation and professional development. Thus, what follows are those subjects and reasons supporting the need for further study.

Adequate Rural School Funding

The one survey respondent who indicated their school funding was sufficient to meet their current budget and operating demands, is located near a ski resort community – keeping in mind that some of the Colorado ski resort communities host many year-around activities outside of those in winter and thus operate throughout the calendar year. Sufficient education funding among rural schools, in general, is not something often found in the literature, and was not an outcome that surfaced more than once within the scope of this research. However, this anomaly, along with those respondents who cited securing additional funds were not part of their role as a rural school leader, would benefit from further examination. Further exploring the effects of Colorado's twenty-one

resort communities on rural social, cultural, and socioeconomic ecologies in an effort to identify similarities and/or differences in the development needs of Colorado's rural schoolteachers and leaders.

Hours Spent Outside of School

Data from this research illustrated that some rural school leaders are spending time in the community building and sustaining relationships through their attendance at town events. However, for those who are spending more than five or 10 hours per week in the rural community and not attending town events, there is more to the story that was not captured as part of this research. Are they building relationships in their rural community in a way that has not been explored? Are there similarities and/or differences in approach to community relationship building among Colorado's rural school leaders? Here too, learning more about how rural school leaders spend their time outside of school hours - both during the school year and during the summer, can better assist with his or her role preparation and perhaps, ongoing professional development.

Role Performance

Differences exist among Colorado's rural school leaders. As reported during the course of this study, rural school leaders may share only a portion of their rural community's social, political, and cultural views, or they may not share them at all. Conflicting messages on sharing or not sharing these views, as described by some of the rural school leaders, was not an important factor to feeling equipped or ill-equipped to serve in a school leader capacity. The difference in shared views, recalling from chapter five where only 7 or 19.44% of the respondents reported they live outside of the rural

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community for which they serve. This suggests the rural school leader, in some instances, performs the leader role in a manner to maintain necessary relationships in the community. Recommended as a subject of further study, this notion of role performance could be a factor of the use of rural schools as a short-term solution towards longer-term professional goals and have underlying effects on the rural school leader being viewed as an outsider. This may also explain some of privacy and constant scrutiny challenges rural school leaders experience as discussed in an earlier chapter.

Gender Perceptions on Alternative Licensure

Both "Joe" and one other male survey participant completed their school leader preparation through an alternative licensure program. The survey respondents in this study were generally 1:1, male to female. No female survey or interview participant expressed or alluded to her completion of an alternative licensure program. Review of the *2015 Educator Preparation Report AY2013-2014* (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2015), did not provide data such to determine the distribution between male and female rural school leaders who completed an alternative licensure program. Therefore, I recommend further study to determine if male and female rural school leaders have similar or opposing views regarding the effectiveness of an alternative licensure program.

Recalling from a previous chapter, there are 20 BOCES chapters across Colorado (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, 2015) and only 6 or 30% of the chapters (Colorado Department of Education, 2014) participate in an alternative principal licensure program for school leaders. Thus, could research identify a connection between

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the gender of the rural school leader and the gender of the BOCES leadership that could explain why only a small portion of BOCES offers alternative licensure programs? Tilting this notion towards a different research approach, could the absence of an alternative licensure program be connected to, irrespective of gender, the location of where the BOCES leader resides (i.e., rural community versus non-rural community) and if so, are there measurable differences between the programs that can provide evidence to support school leader and/or student performance?

Alternative Licensure - Rural School Leader Preparation and Performance

The completion of an alternative principal licensure program can take as-little-as one year and may be extended out to as much as three years. Data, in terms of completion time, illustrates differences in the current programs. However, I did not deeply explore these programs in order to determine their effectiveness or to determine how they align to the state's exam. Interestingly, a comment made by "Joe" regarding the licensure exam, stating, "Quite frankly, I think I could have passed the Principal's Exam without ever having cracked a book or done any training whatsoever" was the only comment made by any of the research participants. I felt his statement could be viewed two different ways. The first, the principal exam may truly lack in rigor or second, the alternative licensure program to which he completed, may have been structured in a way that provided him the necessary skills and experience to adequately pass the principal exam and to effectively operate his rural school.

Examination of both factors, in terms of rural school leader efficacy juxtaposed against student performance, is a subject that would benefit from further study. This

research, as one example, could be conducted to elucidate if and to what degree similarities and/or differences exist among the current alternative licensure programs, and how those similarities or differences contribute to student performance. Moreover, I feel this exploration is needed to determine if there are successful place-based factors that exist among these alternative licensure programs that can inform the evolution of traditional university and/or college-based programs who enroll current rural school leaders and rural school leader aspirants.

Efficacy of Non-Rural Context Designed Preparation on Rural School Leadership

A remark made by one survey respondent (2014), suggested, "Those that come from large schools and cities with no rural experiences, tend to fail." This assertion is noteworthy and appears to be rooted in his or her personal observation. However, this statement could be reversed to suggest rural school leaders with no urban or suburban experiences may be unsuccessful leaders in those non-rural milieus. Rooted in this statement, in terms of leader preparation, is a notion that school leaders in general, are prepared to perform the essential functions of the leader role regardless of context. Moreover, this may explain why some rural school leaders feel they are equipped to perform in a rural school and why one rural school leader, with a doctoral degree and experience in a non-rural setting, felt overqualified in his or her rural school leader role.

However, some of the nuances that exist within the rural contexts may be lost on those school leaders who do not have a rural exposure, experience, and/or education. School leaders who could be prepared to lead across contexts may lose their agency, or ability to lead in rural schools if their newfound skills are not put into practice.

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Conversely, rural school leaders who are educated to lead in non-rural contexts may lose their agency in those contexts if their newfound skills are not put into practice. Thus, as Colorado has a number of universities, colleges, and organizations that offer school leadership licensure, it would be of benefit to engage past graduates who may be leaders in rural schools to determine if their non-rural leadership program helped or hindered their performance as a rural school leader.

Gendered Leadership – A Function of the Rural School Board

The 14.29% difference between the male and female gender distribution in Colorado's rural school leadership, as illustrated in chapter six, calls into question the possibility that males over females in rural areas are selected for greater role responsibilities by their respective school board members. In support of this notion, Gupton and Slick (1996) reported, "many times the positions being filled by women are those that have a minimal power base because they are in smaller more rural school districts" (p. xxvii). Leaning further into this gendered approach, Eckman (2004) reported, "It's very difficult for females to get into administration because all the good ol' boys didn't want to let the females in because they were afraid they couldn't handle the discipline" (p. 197). In Colorado, evidence exists, as provided by a few of the male and female research participants, that obtaining a rural school leader role may be much easier for males compared to their female counterparts.

Expanding research to further explore the possible effects of the gender makeup of the rural school board would be beneficial to the preparation and ongoing professional development of rural school leaders. This preparation and professional development, as

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an example, could be in the form of a course or even a class period designed to illustrate and deliver direction on how to traverse the rural school board to ensure rural school leader success and sustainability.

Performed Rural Assimilation

Interestingly, a piece of advice surfaced that needed a second look. However, as stated earlier in this and the previous chapter, challenges may exist which prevent authentic assimilation to the rural culture for those who may choose, as "Lyn," states, "to *be* rural." As discussed in chapter two, Theobald and Wood (2010), asked a simple but pointed question: "how do people learn to be rural" (p. 17)? The answer to this question may lie within historical narratives, passed down from generation-to-generation. These narratives may unobtrusively encourage the acceptance and resulting persistence of dominant cultural positions and contexts of rural, embedded within and shared by the power frameworks of families, communities, and group constructs (Flora & Flora, 2008). One of the issues that surfaced in this research is the rural community accepting the person as rural and removing the identity of being considered an outsider. As earlier illustrated, for some of Colorado's rural school leaders, this has never been or may never be removed. Her statement also suggests a long-term commitment to rural. Which, in some instances appears to be non-existent as some faculty and school leaders treat rural as a place to stay for only a short time while gaining professional experience.

Alternatively, as research from this study suggests, a long-term commitment to rural may be performed thus by extension, the assimilation to the rural identity may also be performed. Therefore, the acceptance of that identity at fundamental level requires the

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person to abandon their originating culture (Piaget, 1950) which further implies a long-term commitment to that rural for which they intend to assimilate. Moreover, as demonstrated by the contextual differences in Colorado's rural, those who may be accepted as rural in one community may not be in another. This absence of acceptance may in turn, adversely affect the development of personal and professional relationships and by extension their role performance.

Concluding Remarks

The results of this study provided an exploratory view of Colorado's rural school leaders lived experiences. While offering more than a glimpse into their successes and challenges, the generalizability of any research findings produced from this study, is subject to additional research and study replication. Despite role demands, perceptions of role complexity, and perceptions of role fulfillment difficulty, some rural school leaders endure as a response to a perceived sense of duty to both the rural school community (i.e., students, staff, and faculty) and the larger rural community and for others, they may be their only employment opportunity. However, the likelihood of a rural school leader remaining in their role may continue to decline. Exhausted from numerous role responsibilities and further experiencing role burnout, some of Colorado's rural school leaders have begun to look outside of rural for new careers – both in an out of education. For some rural school leaders, he or she have already found a new role outside of the rural community.

Their departure is met with concerns as some rural school leaders have indicated they have no one in their school who can serve as their immediate successor. In addition,

Colorado's rural areas are experiencing an increase in population while both the number of rural schools and the number of enrollments in school-leader licensure programs continues to decline. The departure of the rural school leader places a greater burden on those who remain. In some instances, a rural school principal may adopt the role and responsibilities of the former rural school superintendent or vice versa. In other instances, a rural schoolteacher may be encouraged to step into a role without formal preparation or administration experience. Moreover, the rural schoolteacher, who is the newly appointed rural school leader, may retain portions or all of teaching responsibilities in addition to accepting the roles and responsibilities of the rural school leader.

Drawing from the lived experiences of Colorado's rural school leaders, enacted education funding polices have significant power over their role and over them as school leaders. This power can either be the source of influence behind the successes and sustainability of the Colorado rural school and in some cases, the rural community, or it can influence numerous inequities that may contribute the community and rural school-leader role demise. The power of the education funding policy is also weakened by it. By that, if an enacted education funding policy appears to or in actuality considers only non-rural contexts; the power of that policy within the rural context is weakened as it may have a limited-to-no effect. Furthermore, if the enacted funding policy inaccurately or only somewhat considers the rural settings, here too, the power of that policy is weakened and may further result in unintended, or as perceived by some, intended consequences.

How can Colorado's rural school leaders compete for funding when, as demonstrated by extant literature and the results of this study, they are plagued by an

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excessive number of role responsibilities and often have minimal or no financial support

from the local community? Farmer (2009) confirmed this notion, which is counter to Mr.

Duncan's assertion, saying, "Limited resources create varying degrees of funding ability

for rural school systems. This in turn creates a culture in which competition for existing

resources is necessary" (p. 29). Much like the content within the education funding court

cases that have surfaced over the last fifteen years, Colorado's rural school leaders voiced

similar frustrations on education funding; rendering culpability on Colorado's legislature

and state-education leaders. How many research studies and lawsuits will it take to get

the attention of those in power? The answer to that question is situated current day, and

as demonstrated, with a long reach into Colorado's past. Colorado's rural school leaders

are growing weary and are beginning to abandon their rural school leader roles for those

where support is more readily available. Their departure, without the succession of a

qualified person, places the rural school leader role, the rural school community, and the

rural community at risk.

This risk is illustrated by 63.3% of respondents who indicated they did have

someone who could step into their role immediately, while 18 or 36.7% respondents felt

they did not. Ensuring the succession plan is part of the role as well as the school's

improvement plan, essentially reducing the opportunity for distress by those affected by

the change (Fink & Brayman, 2006). However, given the excessive role demands facing

some rural school leaders, adding the task of ensuring succession planning is just one

more thing they must prioritize within their day-to-day tasks and it is one more thing that

may fall to the side as a lower priority item until the rural school leader retires or voluntarily or involuntarily leaves their role.

This study confirms Colorado's rural places and spaces as significant factors in the rural school leader lived experiences. The awareness of these factors and the acknowledgement of the inherent power they contain is a step in the right direction towards a critical place and space-responsive approach to rural school leader preparation. By being more aware of how rural school leaders interact within their socio-ecological surroundings, those who administer school-leader preparation programs towards state licensure will be better prepared to *place* school-leader preparation and ongoing professional development. In doing so, rural school leaders and rural school leader aspirants can situate their prior ways of knowing to forge significant connections to the critical place and space-responsive curriculum.

Colorado's legislators, state education leaders, and directors of school leader preparation and ongoing professional development programs may not be attending to the needs of some of rural school communities and by extension, their larger rural communities. Each of these factions attend to their own agendas, often only partially considering rural or in some instances, excluding rural altogether. In doing so, some rural school leaders who perceive they are generally being overlooked, must take steps to prevent rural community erosion or worse, eventual extinction. Last, this study confirms that the purposeful investigation of rural school leader lived experiences, has more than the potential to expand rural awareness, to expand the acknowledgement that rural is meaningful, and to expand the acceptance that rural is equal to its non-rural counterparts.

If researchers continue their explorations and examinations of rural, as educators we can be intentional in our development and ongoing evolution of teacher and leader-development towards the knowledge disruption and by extension, the disruption of long-enduring inequities that have been and continue to be a part of Colorado's historical foundation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Principal Age and Gender Distribution

Table A.1 – Percentage Distribution of School Principals by Age (2011-2012)

Principal Age and Gender (%)			
Age	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Less than 45 years	38.9	40.4	37.4
45-54 years	34.9	31.0	31.1
55 years	26.2	28.6	31.6
Average Age (Years)	48	48	49
Gender	**Rural**	**Urban**	**All Schools**
Male	56	40.5	47.6
Female	44	59.5	52.4

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal, BIE School Principal, and Private School Principal Data Files," 2011-2012.

Principal Race Distribution

Table A.2 – Percentage Distribution of School Principals by Race (2011-2012)

Principal Race – Public Schools (%)			
Race	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Black / Non-Hispanic	4.4	20.8	9.4
Hispanic – Regardless of Race	3.2	11.9	6.0
White	90.1	63.4	81.8
Other	2.2	3.9	2.7
Race	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Black / Non-Hispanic	3.3	11.0	9.4
Hispanic – Regardless of Race	2.1	5.1	6.0
White	92.9	79.6	81.8
Other	1.7	4.3	2.7

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal, BIE School Principal, and Private School Principal Data Files," 2011-2012.

Appendix B

Research Theme Support

Policy			Prep			Performance		
State of Colorado	24	3.23%	Principal Prep	60	8.09%	Role Responsbilities	87	11.73%
Funding Opportunities	18	2.43%	Role Preparedness	28	3.77%	Professional Development	45	6.06%
Legislation	13	1.75%	Grow Your Own/Do not GYO	10	1.21%	Excessive Role Demands	24	3.23%
Grant Writing	4	0.54%	Role Interest	4	0.54%	Networking	20	2.70%
			Role Transition/Mentoring	1	0.13%	Big Data	15	2.02%
			Succession Planning	15	1.75%	Role Commitment	3	0.40%
			Intentionally Sought Out Rural	1	0.13%			
Total	59	7.95%	Total	119	16.04%	Total	194	26.15%
			Total Sum	372	50.13%			
Contributing - Policy			Contributing - Prep			Contributing - Perform		
Teacher Retention	40	5.39%	Outsider	21	2.83%	Leader Visibility	10	1.21%
Teacher Recruitment	31	4.18%	Personal Privacy	13	1.75%	Leadership Style	18	2.43%
District Relationships	9	1.21%	Stepping Stone	2	0.27%	Leadership Effectiveness - Needs	4	0.54%
Socioeconomic Status	8	1.08%	School Board Power	6	0.81%	Collaborative Leadership	2	0.27%
Hard-to-Fill Teacher Posi	3	0.40%	Superintendent effectiveness	6	0.81%	Role Satisfaction	1	0.13%
			Home School	3	0.40%	Leader's Child(ren)	7	0.94%
			Special Needs Students	3	0.40%			
Total	91	12.26%	Total	54	7.28%	Total	42	5.66%
			Total Sum	187	25.20%			
G-Total	150	20.22%		173	23.32%		236	31.81%
			G-Total Sum	559	75.34%			
Total Comments: 742								

Once all coding cycles were complete, this document was created to organize and
identify the themes that emerged during the course of this research study. Under each
primary theme, I organized relevant categories to reach, at a minimum, 50 percent.

Appendix C

Internal Review Board (IRB) Approval

Notice of Advisor Change – June 29, 2014

Appendix D

Consent and Copy of the Results

D-1: Informed Consent
D-2: Copy of the Results

Title: Critical Social Ecology of Rural School Leader Development
Protocol Number: 574795-2
Initial Approval Date: April 10, 2014 | IRB Status: Exempt
Expiration Date: April 10, 2019

Investigator's Name	Advisor's Name
Bryan DeShasier bdeshasier@gmail.com 720-284-4147	Dr. Lydsay Agans, Assistant Professor University of Denver Morgridge College of Education Katherine Ruffatto Hall: 357 Denver, Colorado Lyndsay.agans@du.edu

I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program within the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am engaged in a study of rural high school principals who have graduated from an urban-tailored principal preparation program. To help me gain insight into this topic, I am asking you to participate in one interview in which you will be asked to describe your personal history, your current role, and your preparation for the role. This interview will require 60-90 minutes of your time.

Purpose of the study: This study will investigate the role-readiness of rural school principal leaders who have completed an urban-tailored principal preparation program.

Risks and/or Discomforts: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits: The information gained from this study may help us better understand what preparation rural school principal leaders need in order to be well-equipped for their role.

Confidentiality: During the interview, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym to insure identity anonymity. The audio recording will be assigned the pseudonym you choose. The demographic questionnaire will not identify you. The demographic sheet will only have the pseudonym you choose. If audiotaping is permitted, they will only be used to transcribe the interview. The information obtained during this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at conferences and all identities in the final report will be disguised.

Compensation: You will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study.

Freedom to Withdraw: You are free to decide not to enroll in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting their or your relationship with the investigator or the University of Denver. Your decision will not result in a loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent: If you wish to participate in this study, you will be interviewed, complete a demographic questionnaire, and complete a 54 question survey through Survey Monkey.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during research participation, please contact:

Paul Olk Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects 303-871-4531	Office of Research & Sponsored Programs du-irb@du.edu 303-871-4052	University of Denver Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121

_____I am voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study.

_____I understand that my signature certifies that I have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

_____I have been provided a signed copy of this consent form to keep.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my relationship with the investigator or the University of Denver.

I hereby give consent to audio record my interview.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Investigator's Signature   Date

COPY OF THE RESULTS (D-2)

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report, please provide your contact information below.

☐ **Yes**, I would like to receive a copy of the final results of the study.

Please email me a copy of the final results of the study to:
_____

☐ **No**, I would like to receive a copy of the final results of the study.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____
Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Investigator's Signature   Date

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol – Rural School Leaders

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Before Beginning the Interview

☐	Test the audio equipment
☐	Introduce yourself
☐	Discuss the purpose of the study
☐	Provide the Informed Consent
☐	Provide interview structure (i.e., audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym).
☐	Ask the participant if he/she has any questions

1. Please tell me a little bit about you.
    a. Parents; siblings
    b. Education: past, present and future plans
    c. Work history: past, present, and future plans
        i. Were you ever a principal in a non-rural setting?
            1. Please tell me about that.
        ii. Been the principal over more than 1 school in a rural setting?
            1. Please tell me about that.
    d. Social life with family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues
    e. Do you currently live in a rural community?
        i. Please tell me about that

2. In your own words, please tell me what the term rural means to you?
    a. If you were to come up with a definition of rural, what would that be?
    b. How would you explain rural to someone who has had no experience with rural?

3. Did you attend a principal preparation program?
    a. Could you tell me a little more about that experience?
    b. Why did you choose that particular program?

4. Based on your experience and knowledge as a rural school principal, do you feel you were adequately prepared for your position as a rural high school principal?

a. What are some of the challenges you have experienced while in the role?
   i. School/Teacher-related pressures
   ii. Community-related pressures
   iii. Student's family pressures
   iv. Financial
   v. Federal compliance /accountability
b. (as applicable) Have the pressures been different between schools?
c. Have the pressures been different in schools in different communities?

5. Based on your knowledge and experience, what elements should a rural principal development program contain and why?
   a. Can you tell me more about [element]?

6. About how many hours do you spend attending to administrative tasks associated with your role? Non-administrative tasks? Tell me a little bit about that.
   a. Delegate responsibilities?

7. Is there anything that I have not asked you about that you would like to share?

Research questions one (1) and seven (7) were adapted in part, from an interview protocol used by Aaron Schuman (2010) as part of his dissertation research entitled *Rural High School Principals: Leadership in Rural Education.*

Appendix F

Survey Protocol

F-1: Demographics, Personal History and Community Focus (68 Questions)

F-2: Diverse Roles, Faculty and Staff Retention, Support (47 Questions)

F-3: Professional Development, Leadership, Technology, Resources (40 Questions)

F-4: School Accountability, Big Data, Vocational Programs, Change (27 Questions)

F-1: Demographics, Personal History and Community Focus

Q58 I understand that this study is strictly voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without question or penalty.
○ Yes
○ No

Q59 I understand I will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.
○ Yes
○ False

Q60 I understand there are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.
○ Yes
○ False

Q61 Throughout the entire research study and after, I understand my identity and information WILL BE PROTECTED by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
○ Yes
○ False

Q62 I understand the results from this study will be collected, analyzed, and presented to the researcher's dissertation committee and those who attend the defense.
○ Yes
○ False

Q63 I understand the results from this study may be used in professional publications and understand here too, my identity and information will be protected by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
○ True
○ False

Q1 What is your gender?
○ Male
○ Female

Q3 What is your current age?

Q4 Is your ethnicity Hispanic or Latino?
○ Yes
○ No

Q5 Please select one or more of the following races:
❑ American Indian or Alaska Native
❑ Asian
❑ Black or African American
❑ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
❑ White
❑ Unknown
❑ Refuse or decline to respond
❑ None of the Above
❑ Other _____

Q6 What is your sexual orientation?
○ Straight / Heterosexual
○ Gay/Lesbian / Homosexual
○ Bisexual
○ Trans-gender
○ Queer
○ Questioning
○ Refuse or decline to respond

Q7 What is your highest degree earned?
○ Professional / Specialized Degree
○ Associates Degree
○ Bachelor's Degree
○ Master's Degree
○ Doctorate / Juris Doctorate
○ Some college experience but no degree earned
○ No college experience

Q8 What is your household composition?
- ○ Single, Never Married
- ○ Married or Domestic Partnership
- ○ Widowed
- ○ Divorced
- ○ Separated
- ○ Refuse or decline to respond

Q9 What is your individual (NOT HOUSEHOLD) annual income?
- ○ Under $50,000
- ○ $50,000 to $59,999
- ○ $60,000 to $69,999
- ○ $70,000 to $79,999
- ○ $80,000 to $89,999
- ○ $90,000 to $99,999
- ○ $100,000 to $124,999
- ○ $125,000 or more

Q10 What is your current role?
- ○ Principal
- ○ Principal / Faculty
- ○ Interim-Principal
- ○ Assistant/Vice Principal
- ○ Assistant / Vice Principal / Faculty
- ○ Superintendent / Principal
- ○ Superintendent / Principal / Faculty
- ○ Other _____

Q11 Length of time in your current role?
- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 2 years
- ❑ 3 to 4 years
- ❑ 5 to 9 years
- ❑ 10 years or more

Q13 Total length of time employed as school principal, regardless of location?
- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 2 years
- ❑ 3 to 4 years
- ❑ 5 to 9 years
- ❑ 10 years or more
- ❑ Never employed as a school principal

Q14 Total length of time employed as RURAL school principal?
- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 2 years
- ❑ 3 to 4 years
- ❑ 5 to 9 years
- ❑ 10 years or more
- ❑ Never employed as a rural school principal

Q31 Regardless of location, were you a faculty member prior to your role as a principal?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No (If you answer no, what was your role?) _____

Q59 Regardless of location, what is the total length of time spent as a faculty member?
- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 2 years
- ❑ 3 to 4 years
- ❑ 5 to 9 years
- ❑ 10 years or more
- ❑ I have never been a faculty member.

Q15 Were you a faculty member in a RURAL community prior to your role as a principal?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No (If you answer no, what was your role?) _____

Q17 Total length of time spent as a faculty member in a RURAL area?
- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 2 years
- ❑ 3 to 4 years
- ❑ 5 to 9 years
- ❑ 10 years or more
- ❑ I have never been a faculty member in a rural area.

Q18 Regardless of location, what subject(s) did you teach? Please select all that apply. If yours is not listed, please write it in.
- ❑ English/Literature
- ❑ Reading/Writing
- ❑ Physical Education
- ❑ Science
- ❑ Physics
- ❑ Foreign Language
- ❑ Math/Algebra/Geometry/Trigonometry
- ❑ Music
- ❑ Accounting
- ❑ Chemistry
- ❑ Technology
- ❑ Art
- ❑ Write in # 1 _____
- ❑ Write in # 2 _____

Q19 Were you born in a rural community?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q20 Did you attend school in a rural community?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q23 If you can remember, what was the (estimated) population of the town in which you were born and/or where you attended school?

Q60 What is the highest education level you obtained while in a rural community?

○ Elementary

○ Middle / Junior High

○ High School

○ Other: Please explain _____

Q22 Total length of time you lived or have lived in a rural community?

❑ Less than 1 year

❑ 1 to 2 years

❑ 3 to 4 years

❑ 5 to 9 years

❑ 10 years or more

Q25 Growing up, how would you categorize your social class?

○ Lower / Poor

○ Middle

○ Upper / Affluent

○ Unknown

○ Refuse or decline to answer

Q24 In the rural community for which you currently serve in a professional role, what is the (estimated) population?

Q32 Do you currently live in a rural community?

○ Yes

○ No

Q33 Do you live in the same community where you are employed?

○ Yes

○ No

Q34 Did you attend the school as a student for which you now serve?

○ Yes

○ No

Q26 If you are currently employed as a rural school principal, are you currently looking for a new role?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Refuse of decline to answer

Q29 If you answered 'Yes' to question number 26, please elaborate as to your reason(s) you are seeking a new role.

Q27 If you are currently employed as a rural school principal, are you currently looking for a new role that is NOT in a rural community?
❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ Refuse of decline to answer

Q30 If you answered 'Yes' to question number 27, please elaborate as to your reason for a new role that is NOT in a rural community.

Q35 Do you possess personal connections to the rural community?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q68 Do you possess personal connections to the rural SCHOOL community?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q58 Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous questions, what are some examples of your personal connections?

Q36 What views, if at all, do you share with the rural community for which you serve? Please check all that apply.
❑ Social
❑ Political
❑ Cultural
❑ I do not share the same/similar views as the rural community for which I serve a rural school leader.

Q37 Do you feel the rural community members have high expectations of you?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q38 Do you feel the rural school community members have high expectations of you?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q39 Do you feel your actions are under <u>constant </u>scrutiny by rural community members?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Sometimes

Q57 Do you feel your actions are under <u>constant </u>scrutiny by rural SCHOOL community members?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Sometimes

Q40 As it relates to the rural community, do you struggle with a lack of personal privacy?
○ Yes
○ No

Q41 Do you feel you have the respect of the rural community?
○ Yes
○ No

Q42 Do you feel you have the respect of the rural SCHOOL community?
○ Yes
○ No

Q66 At any point in your tenure within the rural community and/or rural school community, did you / do you feel like an outsider?
○ Yes
○ No

Q67 Please elaborate on your feelings of being an outsider, if you have overcome those feelings, and what was your approach?

Q43 Do you take time out of your personal life to respond to outside-of-school needs of parents and/or rural community members?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Sometimes

Q44 Do you feel it is important to interact with rural community members outside of school hours?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ Sometimes

Q45 During the school year, approximately how many hours do you spend per week interacting with the rural community members outside of school hours?
- ❍ Less than 5 hours
- ❍ Between 5 and 10 hours
- ❍ More than 10 hours

Q46 During the summer, approximately how many hours do you spend per week interacting with the rural community members?
- ❍ Less than 5 hours
- ❍ Between 5 and 10 hours
- ❍ More than 10 hours

Q47 Do you participate in rural community events (i.e., town parades, fund raisers, etc.)?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ Sometimes

Q48 Do you feel that your participation in community events supports teacher retention?
- ❍ Definitely yes
- ❍ Probably yes
- ❍ Probably not
- ❍ Definitely not

Q49 Do you feel that your participation in community events promotes trust between the rural community and the rural school?
- ❍ Definitely yes
- ❍ Probably yes
- ❍ Probably not
- ❍ Definitely not

Q50 Do you feel that your role includes responsibility for the welfare of the rural community?
❍ Definitely yes
❍ Probably yes
❍ Probably not
❍ Definitely not

Q69 If the rural school you serve were to close, do you feel the rural community's continued existence would be in jeopardy?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q56 Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, do you feel your responsibility for the welfare of the rural community is directly or indirectly connected to you role?
❍ Directly _____
❍ Indirectly _____
❍ Unknown _____

Q51 What symbols do you feel the rural school represents? Please select all that apply.
❑ Social mobility
❑ Economic prosperity
❑ Identity
❑ Other: If other, please explain. _____

Q52 Do you feel parent involvement increases the connection between the rural school and the rural community?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q53 Of the parents who do have involvement with your rural school, the gender of those involved are:
❍ More men than women
❍ More women than men
❍ It is about equal
❍ It largely depends on the event.

Q54 Do you try and convince parents to shift their views on teaching, learning, and general education?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q55 What is your approach to convincing parents to shift their views on teaching, learning, and general education?

Q61 Related ONLY to your personal history, your rural community, and/or your rural school community focus, is there anything that I have not asked that you would like to share?

Q64 Please contact me, I wish to participate in an individual interview session.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q65 Contact Information
❑ Name _____
❑ Telephone _____
❑ Email _____

F-2: Diverse Roles, Faculty and Staff Retention, Support

Q1 I understand that this study is strictly voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without question or penalty.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q2 I understand I will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q3 I understand there are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q4 I understand the results from this study will be collected, analyzed, and presented to the researcher's dissertation committee and those who attend the defense.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q5 I understand the results from this study may be used in professional publications and under here too, my identity and information will be protected by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q7 What is your gender?
❍ Male
❍ Female

Q9 Is your ethnicity Hispanic or Latino?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q11 Please select one or more of the following races:
- ❑ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ❑ White
- ❑ Unknown
- ❑ Refuse or decline to respond
- ❑ None of the Above
- ❑ Other _____

Q13 What is your highest degree earned?
- ○ Professional / Specialized Degree
- ○ Associates Degree
- ○ Bachelor's Degree
- ○ Master's Degree
- ○ Doctorate / Juris Doctorate
- ○ Some college experience but no degree earned
- ○ No college experience

Q15 What is your current role?
- ○ Principal
- ○ Principal / Faculty
- ○ Interim-Principal
- ○ Assistant/Vice Principal
- ○ Assistant / Vice Principal / Faculty
- ○ Superintendent / Principal
- ○ Superintendent / Principal / Faculty
- ○ Other _____

Q48 Overall, I would classify my rural school as:
- ○ High Performing / High Needs
- ○ High Performing / Low Needs
- ○ Low Performing / High Needs
- ○ Low Performing / Low Needs
- ○ Intermediate Performing / High Needs
- ○ Intermediate Performing / Low Needs

Q16 At any point as a rural school principal leader, does/did your role include more than administrative responsibilities?

❍ Yes

❍ No

Q17 Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, what other roles did you assume? Please select all that apply.

❑ Coach

❑ Classroom Teacher

❑ Instructional Specialist

❑ Assessment Leader

❑ Special Education / Learning Challenges Teachers

❑ Parent Leader

❑ Change Agent

❑ Active Community Volunteer

❑ Janitor / Janitorial Duties

❑ Handyman/Handy-woman/Handy-person

❑ Superintendent

❑ Other # 1 _____

❑ Other # 2 _____

❑ Other # 3 _____

Q19 At any point in time, are/were you ever the principal leader of more than one (1) school?

❍ Yes

❍ No

Q20 Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, how many rural schools did you serve as a principal leader at one time?

❍ 1

❍ 2

❍ 3

❍ More than 3

Q21 While serving as a rural principal leader of multiple schools, what were the school types? Please select all that apply.
- ❑ Elementary
- ❑ Middle/Junior High
- ❑ High School
- ❑ Charter School
- ❑ Alternative School
- ❑ Vocational / Technical
- ❑ Other: (please elaborate) _____

Q50 Did you intentionally seek out a rural school to be the principal leader?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q51 Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, please elaborate on why you intentionally sought out a rural school to be a principal leader.

Q52 Did you ever view the rural school as a 'stepping stone' to gain experience?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q22 As a rural school principal leader, do/did you feel you have/had a difficult time fulfilling your primary role obligations?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q23 Because you answered 'Yes', please elaborate on on why you have/had a difficult time fulfilling your primary role obligations.

Q24 Do/did you ever have administrative support (i.e., assistant / vice-principal) to assist you with your rural school principal leader role?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q25 Do/did you ever delegate administrative/managerial tasks to other school personnel?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q26 Because you answered 'No' to the previous questions, please elaborate on why you did not delegate administrative/managerial tasks to other school personnel.

Q48 Because you answered "Yes' to the previous question, please elaborate on the type of tasks you delegated to other school personnel.

Q27 When you were granted the rural school principal leader role, did you feel you were <u>minimally </u>equipped to take on the role?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q28 Regarding the previous question, "When you were granted the rural school principal leader role, did you feel you were equipped to take on the role?", please elaborate on the reasons <u>why </u>you felt you were or were not equipped.

Q29 Did you feel you had the necessary education to be successful in the rural school principal leader role?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q32 Because you answered 'No' to the previous question, please elaborate on why you feel you did <u>not </u>have the necessary education to be successful in the rural school principal leader role?

Q31 At the time you accepted the rural school principal leader role, what was your highest degree earned?
❍ Professional / Specialized Degree
❍ Associates Degree
❍ Bachelor's Degree
❍ Master's Degree
❍ Doctorate / Juris Doctorate
❍ Some college experience but no degree earned
❍ No college experience

Q55 Do/did you have children that attended the rural school where you served as the principal leader?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q56 Does/did having your children in that rural school influence your decision making when hiring faculty?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q33 Regarding faculty only, what factors do you feel impede their recruitment and retention. Please select all that apply.
❑ Geographic location
❑ Ethnicity and or racial diversity
❑ High expectations from parents/guardians
❑ Exposure/Experience with rural
❑ Budget
❑ Salary
❑ Other # 1 _____
❑ Other # 2 _____

Q34 Regarding faculty only, please discuss your <u>recruiting </u>efforts.

Q40 Regarding faculty only, please discuss your <u>retention </u>efforts.

Q35 Regarding faculty only, do you seek to recruit and hire those with rural exposure and/or experience?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q49 Do you feel faculty use rural schools as a 'stepping stone' to gain teaching experience?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q39 Regarding faculty only, do you explain the potential challenges of working in a rural school to those whom you interview?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q38 Regarding faculty only, what is the minimum education level you seek when recruiting and hiring?
○ Professional / Specialized Degree
○ Associates Degree
○ Bachelor's Degree
○ Master's Degree
○ Doctorate / Juris Doctorate
○ Some college experience but no degree earned
○ No college experience

Q42 Regarding faculty only, do you feel gender plays a role in retention?
○ Yes
○ No

Q43 Regarding faculty only, please select which gender you feel is more successful as a rural school faculty member.
○ Male
○ Female

Q41 As rural school principal leader, do you feel you have someone who could serve as an immediate successor to your role?
○ Yes
○ No

Q44 For someone to be a successor to your role, what do you feel a person needs to know in order to be successful?

Q53 What is the timeline for your retirement?
○ Within 3 years
○ Within 3 to 5 years
○ Within 5 to 7 years
○ Within 7 to 10 years
○ Greater than 10 years

Q46 Do you feel you have the necessary support to be successful in your rural school principal leader role?
○ Yes
○ No

Q47 Because you answered 'No' to the previous question, please elaborate on why you feel you do not have the necessary support to be successful in your role.

Q45 Regarding the diverse role of the rural school principal leader, faculty and staff recruitment and retention, and general support, is there anything else you would like to share that I did not ask?

F-3: Professional Development, Leadership, Technology, Resources

Q2 I understand that this study is strictly voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without question or penalty.
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q4 I understand I will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.
❍ Yes
❍ False

Q6 I understand there are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.
❍ Yes
❍ False

Q8 Throughout the entire research study and after, I understand my identity and information WILL BE PROTECTED by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
❍ Yes
❍ False

Q10 I understand the results from this study will be collected, analyzed, and presented to the researcher's dissertation committee and those who attend the defense.
❍ Yes
❍ False

Q12 I understand the results from this study may be used in professional publications and understand here too, my identity and information will be protected by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
❍ True
❍ False

Q28 What is your gender?
❍ Male
❍ Female

Q30 Is your ethnicity Hispanic or Latino?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q32 Please select one or more of the following races:
❑ American Indian or Alaska Native
❑ Asian
❑ Black or African American
❑ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
❑ White
❑ Unknown
❑ Refuse or decline to respond
❑ None of the Above
❑ Other _____

Q34 What is your highest degree earned?
○ Professional / Specialized Degree
○ Associates Degree
○ Bachelor's Degree
○ Master's Degree
○ Doctorate / Juris Doctorate
○ Some college experience but no degree earned
○ No college experience

Q36 What is your current role?
○ Principal
○ Principal / Faculty
○ Interim-Principal
○ Assistant/Vice Principal
○ Assistant / Vice Principal / Faculty
○ Superintendent / Principal
○ Superintendent / Principal / Faculty
○ Other _____

Q40 Overall, I would classify my rural school as:
○ High Performing / High Needs
○ High Performing / Low Needs
○ Low Performing / High Needs
○ Low Performing / Low Needs
○ Intermediate Performing / High Needs
○ Intermediate Performing / Low Needs

Q7 Do/did you feel you have quality professional development <u>opportunities</u>available to you?

○ Yes

○ No

Q8 Do/did you feel you have quality professional development <u>resources</u>available to you?

○ Yes

○ No

Q9 What topics do you feel should be included as part of rural school principal leader professional development?

❑ School-Community Partnerships

❑ Financial Management

❑ Big Data

❑ Mentoring / Coaching

❑ Leadership in a rural community

❑ Rural community culture

❑ Rural school community culture (i.e., rural students, rural faculty, and rural staff).

❑ Other # 1 _____

❑ Other # 2 _____

❑ Other # 3 _____

Q10 Are there any other topics or items you would like to recommend for rural school principal leader professional development?

Q11 Do/did you have the opportunity to network with other rural school principal leaders?

○ Yes

○ No

Q12 Would having the opportunity to network with other rural school principal leaders be helpful?

○ Yes

○ No

Q13 What would you hope to gain through networking with other rural school principal leaders?

Q14 Do you encourage the use of education-based technology (i.e., iPads, education-based games, etc.) in your rural school?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q15 Are there any obstacles which impede the use of technology in your rural school?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q20 Do/did you have the resources to navigate around obstacles which impede the use of technology in your rural school?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q21 Because you answered 'No' to the previous question, please elaborate on what resources do you feel would assist you with navigating obstacles which impede you ruse of technology in your rural school?

Q19 If at all, what methods do you employ to overcome those obstacles which impede the use of technology in your rural school?

Q16 Does/did you role as a rural school principal leader include securing additional funding to continue or start new programs and/or educational services?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q17 Prior to starting your role as a rural school principal leader, did you have grant writing experience?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q18 Would having a professional development course on grant writing be helpful?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q22 Regarding the professional development course on grant writing, what level of development would you be interested in? Please select all that apply.
❑ Entry-level grant writing
❑ Intermediate-level grant writing
❑ Advanced-level grant writing

Q23 Do you feel having a grant-writing mentor would be helpful?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q24 According to research, funding for rural schools has been shown to be less than their urban and/or suburban counterparts. On average, how much extra money do you feel your rural school needs in order to ensure students have a satisfactory opportunity to learn?
❍ My rural school has sufficient funding.
❍ Between $1,000 and $24,999
❍ Between $25,000 and $49,999
❍ Between $50,000 and $74,999
❍ Between $80,000 and $99,999
❍ Greater than $100,000 but less than $150,000
❍ Greater than $150,000

Q25 Do you feel you have the support needed to increase funding for your rural school?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q26 Because you answered 'No' to the previous questions, please elaborate on the support needed to increase funding for your rural school.

Q38 What is your leadership style? Please select only those styles which apply.
❑ Transactional - According to Burns (1978) and Ross and Gray (2006) suggest this style of leadership works towards the accomplishment of organizational goals with no motivation by the transactional leader to "elevate the motives of followers" (p. 180).
❑ Transformational - is defined as a foundational underpinning through which leaders choose to act collaboratively through the empowerment of their followers by aligning the goals and objectives of the follower's to the goals and objectives of the group with whom the followers are a part, the leader, and the larger organization (Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Strauss, T, 2010; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).
❑ Instructional - Instructional leadership, according to Halliger (2007), is a function of the school principal leader role and has three dimensions: 1) "defining the school's mission (including framing and communicating school goals); 2) managing the instructional program (including the supervision and evaluation of instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress); and 3) promoting a positive learning environment (including protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for

320

teachers, enforcing academic standards, and providing incentives for students)" (p. 225).

❑ Collaborative - Hallinger and Heck (2010) suggest the definition of collaborative leadership to be one that "focuses on strategic school-wide actions that are directed towards school improvement and shared among the principal, teachers, administrators, and others (p. 97.)

❑ Other # 1 _____
❑ Other # 2 _____

Q41 Has your leadership style evolved over time?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q42 Because you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, please elaborate on how your leadership style has evolved.

Q43 Because you answered 'No' to the previous question, please elaborate on why your leadership style has not evolved.

Q39 Did/do you feel you are an effective leader?
❍ Yes
❍ No

Q40 Because you answered 'No' to the previous question, please elaborate on what you need be an effective leader.

Q44 Do you feel the superintendent leadership for your rural school is effective?
❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ Sometimes

Q41 Regarding your leadership style(s) in general, is there anything else you would like to share?

F-4: School Accountability, Big Data, Vocational Programs, Change

Q2 I understand that this study is strictly voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without question or penalty.
> Yes
> No

Q4 I understand I will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.
> Yes
> False

Q6 I understand there are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.
> Yes
> False

Q8 Throughout the entire research study and after, I understand my identity and information WILL BE PROTECTED by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
> Yes
> False

Q10 I understand the results from this study will be collected, analyzed, and presented to the researcher's dissertation committee and those who attend the defense.
> Yes
> False

Q12 I understand the results from this study may be used in professional publications and understand here too, my identity and information will be protected by the researcher through the use of a pseudonym, where applicable.
> True
> False

Q8 What is your gender?
> Male
> Female

Q10 Is your ethnicity Hispanic or Latino?
> Yes
> No

Q12 Please select one or more of the following races:
> American Indian or Alaska Native
> Asian

Black or African American
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
White
Unknown
Refuse or decline to respond
None of the Above
Other _____

Q14 What is your highest degree earned?
Professional / Specialized Degree
Associates Degree
Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree
Doctorate / Juris Doctorate
Some college experience but no degree earned
No college experience

Q16 What is your current role?
Principal
Principal / Faculty
Interim-Principal
Assistant/Vice Principal
Assistant / Vice Principal / Faculty
Superintendent / Principal
Superintendent / Principal / Faculty
Other _____

Q18 Overall, I would classify my rural school as:
High Performing / High Needs
High Performing / Low Needs
Low Performing / High Needs
Low Performing / Low Needs
Intermediate Performing / High Needs
Intermediate Performing / Low Needs

Q19 Does/did your role include the development and completion of reports, tables, charts, and other 'like' documents?
Yes
No

Q20 On the following scale, rate your data mining skills (as it stands currently) to complete these reports. [Data mining refers to the ability to access, in some cases raw data, to analyze and produce reports.]
I struggle and cannot complete them without significant assistance.

I struggle but I manage to complete them with some assistance.
I can complete the reports with no problem.

Q22 Do/did you delegate the completion of the required state / federal reports?
Yes - All the time
No - Never
Sometimes

Q21 Regarding student performance accountability pressures:
I am facing these pressures completely alone with no support from my superintendent or rural school community.
I have some support, but largely I am facing these accountability pressures alone.
I have great support and we, as a rural school community, are facing these accountability pressures as a unified team.

Q24 Regarding federal and state mandates, how do you feel about their alignment to rural school characteristics:
Completely misaligned
Somewhat misaligned
Somewhat aligned
Click to write Choice 5

Q25 Regarding federal and state mandates, how do you feel about their alignment to rural student demographics:
Completely misaligned
Somewhat misaligned
Somewhat aligned
Completely aligned
I do not know

Q26 Regarding federal and state mandates, what suggestions if any, would you give legislators?

Q27 Do you have vocational / technical programs at your rural school?
Yes
No

Q31 Did you have vocational / technical programs at your rural school at one point in time?
Yes
No

Q28 Do you feel the vocational / technical program concept is beneficial to the students?
Yes

No

Q29 Because you answered 'No' to the previous question, please elaborate as to why you feel vocational/technical programs are not beneficial to students in your rural school.

Q30 What vocational / technical programs do/did you have at your rural school? Please select all that apply.
    Culinary
    Auto/Motorcycle Mechanic / Auto-Body
    Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
    Cosmetology
    AC/Heating/Refrigeration Repair
    Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)
    Medical Assisting
    Other 1 _____
    Other 2 _____

Q32 Regarding school accountability, big data, vocational/technical programs, and change, is there anything you would like to share that I have not asked?

Q33 Regarding any other rural-related subject matter, is there anything that you feel I should consider and/or include in this research?

Appendix G

G-1: Email Template Requesting Participation

G-2: Email Template Thanking the Potential Participant for the Reply

G-3: Email Template for Scheduling

G-1: Email Template Requesting Participation

Hello:

My name is Bryan DeShasier and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education - Student Diversity program at the University of Denver. You have been identified as a rural school leader as defined by the Colorado Department of Education Rural Education Council. http://www.cde.state.co.us/ruraledcouncil.

I am writing you to ask for your participation in an exploratory research study designed to understand the 'lived-experiences' of rural school principal leaders in Colorado.

About the Researcher: I am a 41 year old professional who returned to college in 2008 to pursue a PhD. The first 26 years of my life were spent on a farm within a remote rural community in central/southern Illinois; [town one/town tow]. As a first generation college student, I earned my undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of Illinois, my MBA from Hood College in Maryland, and hope to earn my PhD from the University of Denver in December 2014. I will be the first in my family lineage to earn a PhD. This and the future of my education research will focus on increasing attention to the education-related needs of rural community schools and their leaders. If you wish to know more about me, please see my Linked In profile at: [link].

PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY WITHDRAW AT ANY TIME WITHOUT QUESTION OR PENALTY.

Purpose of the Study: At a high level, the purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how rural school principal leaders perform the functions of their role in rural spaces. This will include but may not be limited to understanding the principal leader's approach and philosophy behind role demands, challenges, and successes. The data generated from this research will be used to:
1.   Increase the attention of Universities on understanding rural schools and their leaders;
2.   Provide clarity on the rural school principalship from the position and voice of those who serve in that role;
3.   Generate a model with which rural school principal leaders can benefit through meaningful professional development access, opportunities, and subject matter; and
4.   Strengthen the development and preparation of aspiring principal leaders who may find themselves in a rural school at some point in their career. By extension, this research will have implications for superintendent roles.

Participant Options: As a member of this research study:

1.   You will be asked to complete *four* 10-to-15 minute surveys over a two week period (schedule is below). Each survey will focus on a different topic and are primarily

made up of yes/no questions with a few "please elaborate" items thrown in. **Additionally, I am hoping to obtain the interest of 15-to-20 participants who are willing to be interviewed.** Rather than place a time restriction (i.e., 90 minutes); the time you spend with me will be guided by you and the information you want to share. I will work around your schedule, travel to you or we can have a Skype or Google Hangout session if that is better for you. Please let me know in the first survey or by replying to this email if you wish to be an interview participant.

Research Study Supervision: This study is being supervised by [dissertation advisor], dissertation committee chair and Assistant Professor in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. [Pronoun] can be reached at [telephone number] or at [email address].

Participant Risks: There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. Your identity and information will be protected, as pseudonyms will be used to replace your name. Collected data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. I am unable to identify personal information through survey results - unless you provide your name and contact information. Findings from this research will be presented to dissertation committee members: [dissertation advisor], [committee member #1], and [committee member # 2] and those who attend the defense. If you have questions regarding the researcher, the research findings, or wish to have a copy of the findings, you may contact the researchers at [telephone number] or [email address #1] or [email address # 2].

Participation Agreement: If you do <u>not</u> wish to participate in this study, please reply with "I am not interested in participating" and I will remove your name from the distribution. However, if you do wish to participate, please complete the first survey below. Again, **PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY WITHDRAW AT ANY TIME WITHOUT QUESTION OR PENALTY.**

Please allow me to be your voice and advocate for you; your students; faculty and staff; and the rural community. Below you will find the survey schedule and their associated topics. Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Bryan DeShasier, PhD Candidate & Rural Researcher
University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education
Denver, Colorado

Survey Delivery Schedule

- Survey # 1: Thursday, May 29, 2014 – Demographics, Personal History and Community Focus [link to survey 1]

- Survey # 2: Monday, June 2, 2014 – Diverse Roles, Faculty and Staff Retention, Support [link to survey 2]

- Survey # 3: Thursday, June 5, 2014 – Professional Development, Leadership, Technology, Resources [link to survey 3]

- Survey # 4: Monday, June 9, 2014 – School Accountability, Big Data, Vocational Programs, Change [link to survey 4]

All surveys will remain available until 5pm on June 30, 2014.

G-2: Email Template Thanking the Potential Participant for the Reply

[Appropriate salutation]:

 Thank you for your interest in participating in this research on understanding the lived experiences of rural school principal leaders in Colorado. I am honored and thrilled to have your participation as I feel your background and experience will bring a tremendous amount of value to not only this research but it will also increase awareness and I hope, will generate much needed attention to and about rural.

Below you will find a link to Doodle Scheduler with multiple dates and times made available throughout June. Once you schedule a time that best fits, I will contact you to discuss meeting logistics (i.e., Skype, in-person visit, etc.). If a date and time on the calendar does not meet your schedule, please contact me for other arrangements. I will make every effort to work around your schedule and location. Doodle Scheduler: [link to Doodle Scheduler].

A few days prior to the interview, I will send you the questions I am going to ask in order to give you time to think about and 'jot down' what information you want to share and how you want to share it. In addition, there will be a couple of forms to sign – those too, will be distributed ahead of our visit. Again, your identity remains strictly confidential both during and after this process.

At your request, as noted on one of the forms which you will receive, I am happy to provide you a copy of the final research results and would welcome your attendance at my defense; tentatively slated for late October or early November.

Again, thank you for your participation as I know your schedules are terribly busy and you are approaching a much needed summer break. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,
Bryan DeShasier
Mobile: Telephone Number

PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY WITHDRAW AT ANY TIME WITHOUT QUESTION OR PENALTY.

Research Study Supervision: This study is being supervised by [advisor name], dissertation committee chair and Assistant Professor in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. She can be reached at [telephone number] or at [email address].

Participant Risks: There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. Your identity and information will be protected, as pseudonyms will be used to replace your name. Collected data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. I am unable to identify personal information through survey results - unless you provide your name and contact information. Findings from this research will be presented to dissertation committee members: [Committee Advisor], Committee Member # 1, and Committee Member # 2 and those who attend the defense. If you have questions regarding the researcher, the research findings, or wish to have a copy of the findings, you may contact the researchers at [contact information].

G-3: Email Template for Scheduling

Dear [participant name]:

A sincere thank you for being a participant in my research. ***Would you be able to meet via [method] on [date and time]?***

Attached please find:

> **Informed Consent Form**: Please review, sign, and return <u>prior </u>to our visit. Upon receipt, I will sign it and send you a copy to retain for your own records;

> **Copy of the Results Form**: Please complete and return if you wish to receive a copy of the final dissertation;

> **Pseudonym Form**: Please provide your name and a pseudonym name of your choosing.

> **Interview Protocol**: A list of general questions I will be asking during our visit. Feel free to review the questions and take notes ahead of time. It is my expectation the interview will be more conversational and less like a question/answer session. You may decline to answer any question at any time.

Please contact me with any questions!

Best,
Bryan DeShasier
[Telephone number]

Quality Counts 2015: State Report Cards Map

Source. http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2015/2015-state-report-cards-map.html
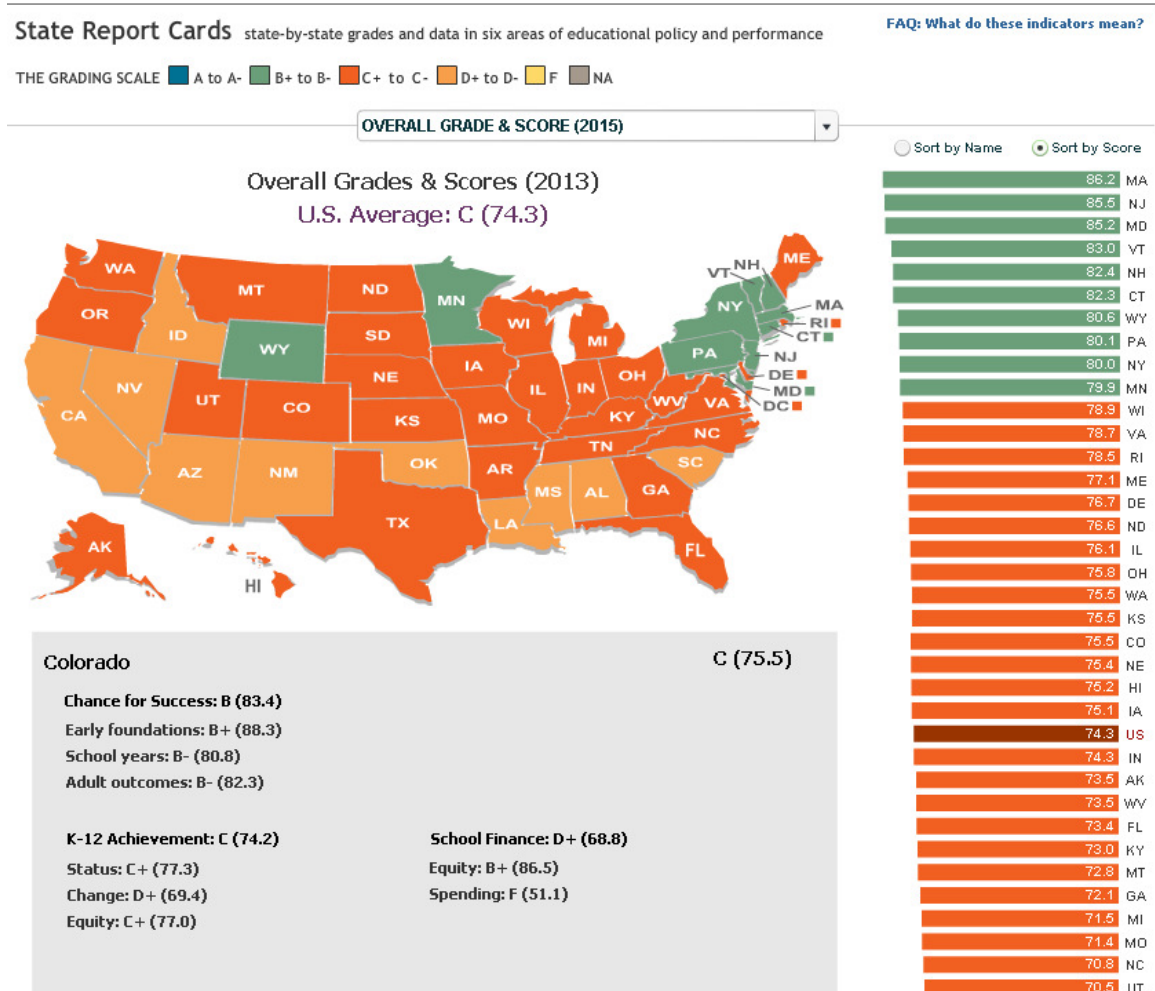
Appendix I

Colorado Rural Fact Sheet (2014)

Source. http://www.cde.state.co.us/ruraledcouncil/ruraledcouncilfactsheet

Appendix J

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

201 East Colfax Avenue • Denver, Colorado 80203-1799
303.866.6600 • www.cde.state.co.us

Robert K. Hammond
Commissioner of Education

Keith Owen, Ph.D.
Deputy Commissioner

January 28, 2013

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Directors:

The Colorado Department of Education, in partnership with the Rural Education Council, has been working to revise the current CDE definition of rural school districts to more closely portray the number of districts considered rural by Colorado educators. This work was recently completed, and the Rural Education Council has provided me with a definition they would like to see the department use going forward. I have approved its recommended definition. The Council has asked to review this definition each year to ensure it is working for districts, and for the opportunity to make any recommended changes as necessary.

The following is the newly revised definition of rural school districts as recommended by the Rural Education Council:

> A Colorado school district is determined to be rural based on the size of the district, the distance from the nearest large urban/urbanized area, and having a student enrollment of approximately 6,500 students or fewer. Small rural districts are those districts meeting these same criteria and having a student population of fewer than 1,000 students.

The rural definition above is based on the following components and how these components impact each other:

- Distances from urban clusters, urbanized areas and census-defined rural territories as used by the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics);

- Student enrollment of approximately 6,500 students or fewer.

- And, for the small rural subset, a student population of fewer than 1,000 students.

Urbanized areas and urban clusters, as used by the NCES, are densely settled "cores" of Census-defined blocks with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas. Core areas with populations of 50,000 or more are designated as urbanized areas; those with populations between 25,000 and 50,000 are designated as urban clusters. Specifically, the Rural Education Council believed the following NCES considerations best described the concept of rural in Colorado in addition to the student enrollment of a school district.

- Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area;
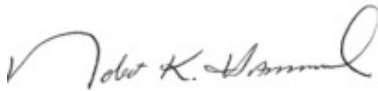
cde
COLORADO DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

- Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area;

- Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area;

- Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster;

- Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster;

- Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Attached is a spreadsheet showing the distribution of districts considered rural and small rural using this new CDE definition.

I want to thank the Rural Education Council for its support in developing this new definition. We are very proud of the work our rural school districts are doing and feel this new definition will help CDE align support and resources to better assist our rural districts. It will also help the department to better communicate to all stakeholders the different challenges and supports our rural districts' need.

Sincerely,

Robert Hammond
Commissioner
Colorado Department of Education

Source.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/ruraledcouncil/download/ruraldefinitionletter12813.pdf

Appendix K

Colorado Rural Education Council Mission

Source. http://www.cde.state.co.us/ruraledcouncil

Appendix L

Colorado Rural Education Council Members

Search

CO CDE COLORADO
Department of Education

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Location
201 East Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-866-6600
Fax: 303-830-0793

Hours: Mon - Fri 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Home / Commissioner of Education / Rural Education Council

Rural Education Council Members

The Council is comprised of one rural superintendent from each of the eight regions in the state and representatives from local school boards, teachers, principals, and business/community members.

Council Members

- **Don Anderson**, *Executive Director*
  East Central BOCES
- **Douglas Bissonette**, *Superintendent*
  Elizabeth School District C-1
- **Randy Black**, *Director of Member Relations*
  Colorado Association of School Boards
- **Bruce Caughey**, *Executive Director*
  Colorado Association of School Executives
- **Scott Cuckow**, *Superintendent*
  Crowley County School District RE-1J
- **Ken Haptonstall**, *Superintendent*
  Garfield County School District 16
- **John Knapp**, *Department of Agriculture and Board of Directors*
  Colorado Association of School Boards
- **Dale McCall**, *Executive Director*
  Colorado BOCES

- **Rick Mondt**, *Superintendent*
  Briggsdale School District RE-10
- **Raylene Olinger**, *Principal*
  South Routt Elementary, South Routt School District RE-3
- **Donna Rohde**, *School Board Member*
  Cheraw School District 31
- **Paula Stephenson**, *Executive Director*
  Colorado Rural Schools Caucus
- **Kyle Stumpf**, *Principal*
  Holyoke Elementary, Holyoke School District Re-1J
- **George Welsh**, *Superintendent*
  Center Consolidated School District 26JT
- **Troy Zabel**, *Superintendent*
  Bayfield School District

The Rural Council will work closely with Tina Goar, the Department's special advisor on rural needs and Deputy Commissioner Keith Owen who assembled and will oversee the Council.

Please contact Tina Goar 303-866-6608 with any questions.

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Source. http://www.cde.state.co.us/ruraledcouncil/members

Appendix M

Request to use UHPC 2916 – C.G. Sargent Photo

Appendix N

Rural Education Council – Meeting Presentations and Notes

Appendix O

License Agreement to Use UHPC 2916 – C.G. Sargent Photo

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Appendix P

Principal Education Distribution

Table P.1 – Percentage Distribution of School Principals by Education (2011-2012)

Principal Education – Public Schools (%)			
Education	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Bachelor's or Less	1.7	3.6	8.6
Master's degree	65.9	59.4	59
Education Specialist or Professional Diploma	25.8	24.7	22.7
Doctoral or first professional degree	6.6	12.3	9.7
Principal Education – Private Schools (%)			
Education	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Bachelor's or Less	47.7	20.9	8.6
Master's degree	37.8	56.7	59
Education Specialist or Professional Diploma	9.3	10.1	22.7
Doctoral or first professional degree	5.1	12.3	9.7

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal, BIE School Principal, and Private School Principal Data Files," 2011-2012.

Appendix Q

Principal Experience Distribution

Table Q.1 – Percentage Distribution of School Principals by Experience (2011-2012)

Principal Experience – Public Schools (Years)			
Experience	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Average total years	7.3	6.8	8
Average years at current school	4.3	3.9	4.9
Less than 2 years	31.8	36.1	30.8
2-3 years	23.4	22	21.6
4-9 years	33.2	31.9	32.5
10 years or more	11.6	10.1	15.2
Principal Experience – Private Schools (Years)			
Experience	**Rural**	**Urban (City)**	**All Schools**
Average total years	9.7	11.0	8
Average years at current school	6.5	7.6	4.9
Less than 2 years	29.4	22	30.8
2-3 years	19.5	17.7	21.6
4-9 years	24.6	29.8	15.2
10 years or more	26.5	30.5	

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal, BIE School Principal, and Private School Principal Data Files," 2011-2012.

Appendix R

Urban-Centric Locale Categories (NCES, 2006)

Locale	Definition
City	
Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more
Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000
Suburb	
Large	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more
Midsize	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000
Town	
Fringe	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area
Distant	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area
Remote	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area
Rural	
Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster

Source: Office of Management and Budget (2000). Standards for Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas; Notice. Federal Register (65) No. 249

Appendix S

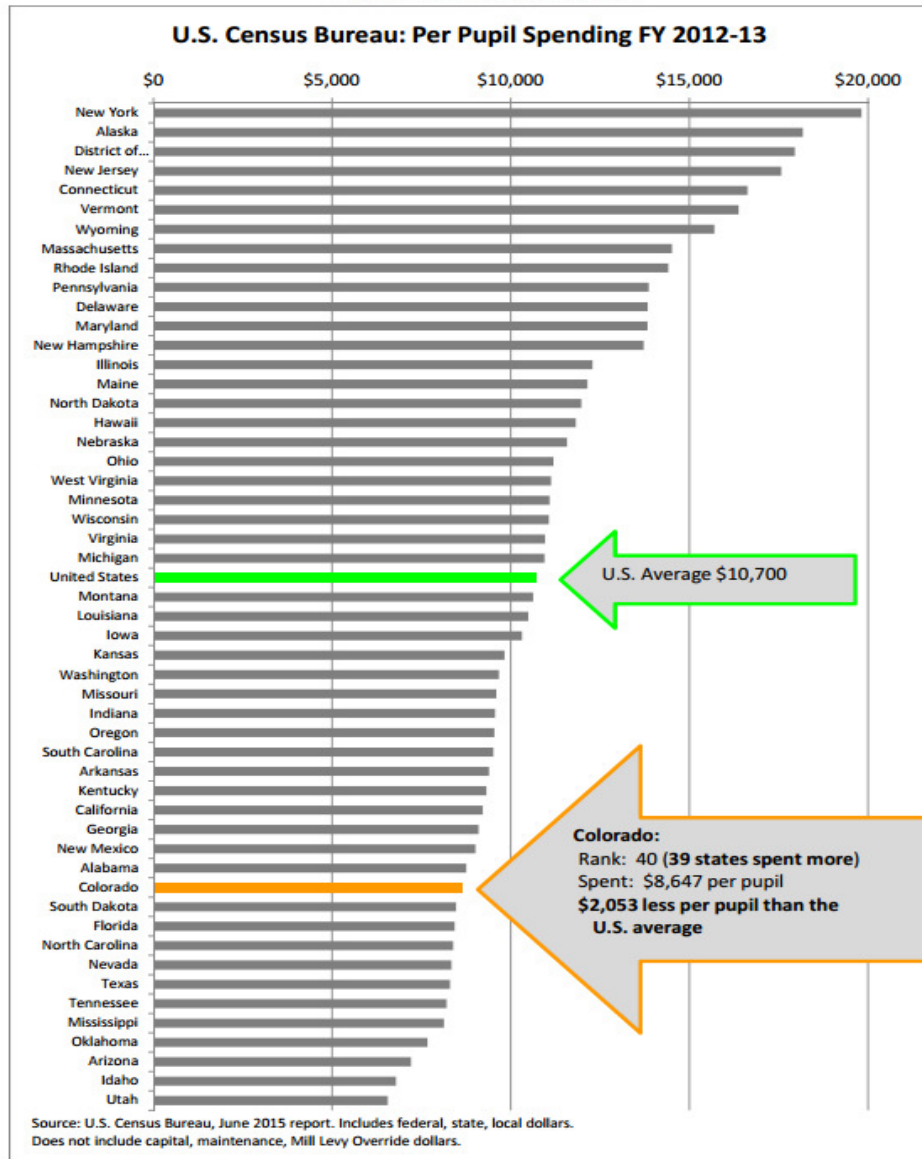**Historical Context – Principal Role Themes (1993)**

Principal Role Theme	Characteristics& Dominant Metaphorical Themes
1920's: Values Broker	The principal role is spritiual in nature and dominated by religion. Expectations of the principal during this time period is one of being a social leader guided by scientific management.
1930's: Scientific Manager	As an executive within the school, the primary role is now administrative and not instructional; "established as a profession separate from, but related to, teaching" (p. 23).
1940's Democratic Leader	A leader; curriculum developer, group leader, coordinator and supervisor. The role of the principal in the 1940's had become more multifaceted and democratic.
1950's: Theory-guided Administrator	Experienced leader with skills informed by teaching and managing as well as finding insight from educational, psychological, sociological, and business research. Further, the principal is expected to be effective and efficient at the use of time.
1960's: Bureacratic Executive	Bureaucratic leader and protector of the bureaucratis system; increased level of power, authority, and responsibility. Increased levels of accountiblity begin to create confusion around role expectations.
1970's: Humanistic Facilitator	Expectations of being a school and community leader; imparts meaning to educational efforts, and role confusion is at its strongest. The principal begins to adopt additional roles; regardless of her/his skills and abilities.
1980's: Instructional Leader	Instructional leader, problem solver, resource and solutions provider, and visionary. In the 1980's "…a good principal is expected to go beyond painting the portrait of a good school. She/he is charged with leading schools towards the realization of that vision" (p. 148).

Source: Adapted from Beck, L. G., & Murphy, J. (1993).Understanding the principalship: Metaphorical Themes 1920's-1990's. New York: Teachers College Press.
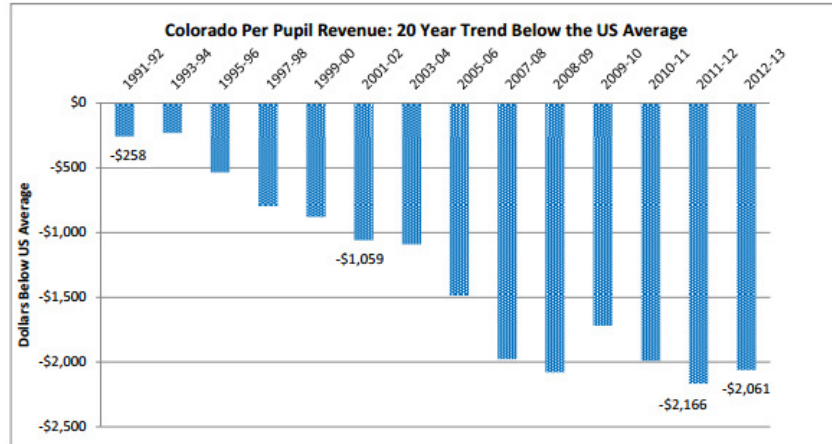
U.S. Census Bureau: Per Pupil Spending FY 2012-13

Source: http://www.cosfp.org/HomeFiles/USCensus/FY2012-13/US_Census_Per_Pupil_Spending_FY2012-13.pdf
Retrieved: June 21, 2015

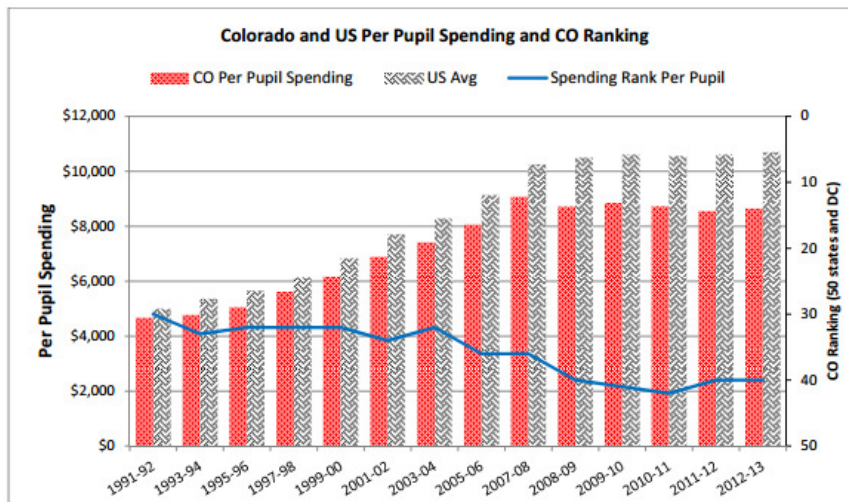**Colorado Per Pupil Revenue – 20 Year Trend; Spending & Ranking**

Colorado Per Pupil Revenue: 20 Year Trend Below the US Average

COLORADO SCHOOL FINANCE PROJECT
Support Children - Support The Future

Per Pupil *Spending* & Ranking: Comparing Colorado and the US Average
Source: US Census Data 1991-92 thru 2012-13

Colorado and US Per Pupil Spending and CO Ranking

- From 2008-09 to 2012-13, Colorado per pupil spending remained **below 2007-08** levels. During the same period, the **US average per pupil spending continued to increase**.
- The **per pupil spending gap** between Colorado and the national average continues to grow and was **$-2,053**.
- In the **early 90's Colorado ranked 30th** in per pupil spending, in 2001-02 34th, and **since 2008 has hovered around 40th**.

Source: http://www.cosfp.org/ - Retrieved: June 21, 2015

Illustration of Total Program Calculation

E) Illustration of Total Program Calculation

In budget year 2014-15, Total Program funding for all 178 school districts is projected to range from $6,660.68 per pupil to $15,548.03 per pupil, with an average across all districts of $7,021 per pupil.

Illustration Examples	Low PPR	High PPR	On-line PPR
Funded Pupil Count	8,945.2	67.7	64,053.0
Base Funding (BF)	$6,121.00	$6,121.00	$6,121.00
Cost of Living (CL)	1.163	1.175	1.244
Personnel Costs (PL)	88.61%	80.03%	90.50%
Size (SZ)	1.0297	2.3292	1.0297
Total Per-Pupil Funding [SZ*[(BF*CL*PL)+(BF*(1-PL))]	$7,213.13	$16,253.77	$7,694.58
At-Risk Pupil Count	3,106.0	25.0	6,588.0
"Base" At-Risk Funding 12% * Total Per-pupil Funding	$866	$1,950	$923
"Population" At-Risk Funding district % > state %	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total At-Risk Funding (included in Total Per-Pupil Funding)	$2,688,479	$48,761	$6,083,024
On-line Pupil Count	N/A	N/A	3,148.5
Per-Pupil Funding	N/A	N/A	$7,381
Total On-Line Funding	N/A	N/A	$23,239,079
Total Program Formula	$67,211,399	$1,149,141	$497,956,444
Per-Pupil (Pre - Negative Factor)	$7,513.68	$16,974.02	$7,774.13
Total Program Formula Guarantee (Pre - Negative Factor)	$68,603,512	$519,212	$491,242,313
Minimum Per-Pupil Funding Guarantee (Pre - Negative Factor)	$7,669.31	$7,669.31	$7,669.31
<1> Negative Factor -13.15%	($9,022,380.31)	($151,129.14)	($65,488,665.15)
Total Program Funding (Post - Negative Factor)	$59,581,132	$998,012	$432,467,779
Total Program Per-Pupil Funding (Post -Negative Factor)	$6,660.68	$14,741.69	$6,751.72

<1> As of July 2014, projected student counts and enrollment mixes based on current state law, House Bill 14-1298 (Public School Finance Act), generate the need for a -13.15% Negative Factor in FY 2014-15.

Source: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/fy2014-15brochure. Retrieved June 21, 2015.

Appendix W

Colorado Total Per-Pupil Base Funding & State-Share

- ### *Total Per-pupil Funding*

    Base Funding -- the base amount of funding for each pupil is $6,121.00 in budget year 2014-15. **Funding is added to this amount based on the specific factors as outlined below to arrive at a Total Per-pupil Funding amount for each district.**

Source: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/fy2014-15brochure. Retrieved June 21, 2015.

DETERMINING STATE SHARE

Funding from the state (State Share) is provided to each school district whose Local Share is insufficient to fully fund its Total Program. Payments of State Share moneys are made monthly to districts and are funded primarily from state income (personal and corporate) and sales and use tax revenues collected.

In budget year 2014-15, State Share financing to districts is projected to range from $0 per pupil to $11,397.05 per pupil (0% to 95% respectively, of total program). Starting in FY 2009-10 the guarantee for minimum state aid was eliminated through House Bill 09-1318 and districts are no longer guaranteed an amount from the state.

Statewide across all school districts, State Share is projected to provide $4,677.74 per pupil, or about 66.63% of Total Program funding.

Source: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/fy2014-15brochure. Retrieved June 21, 2015.

Appendix X

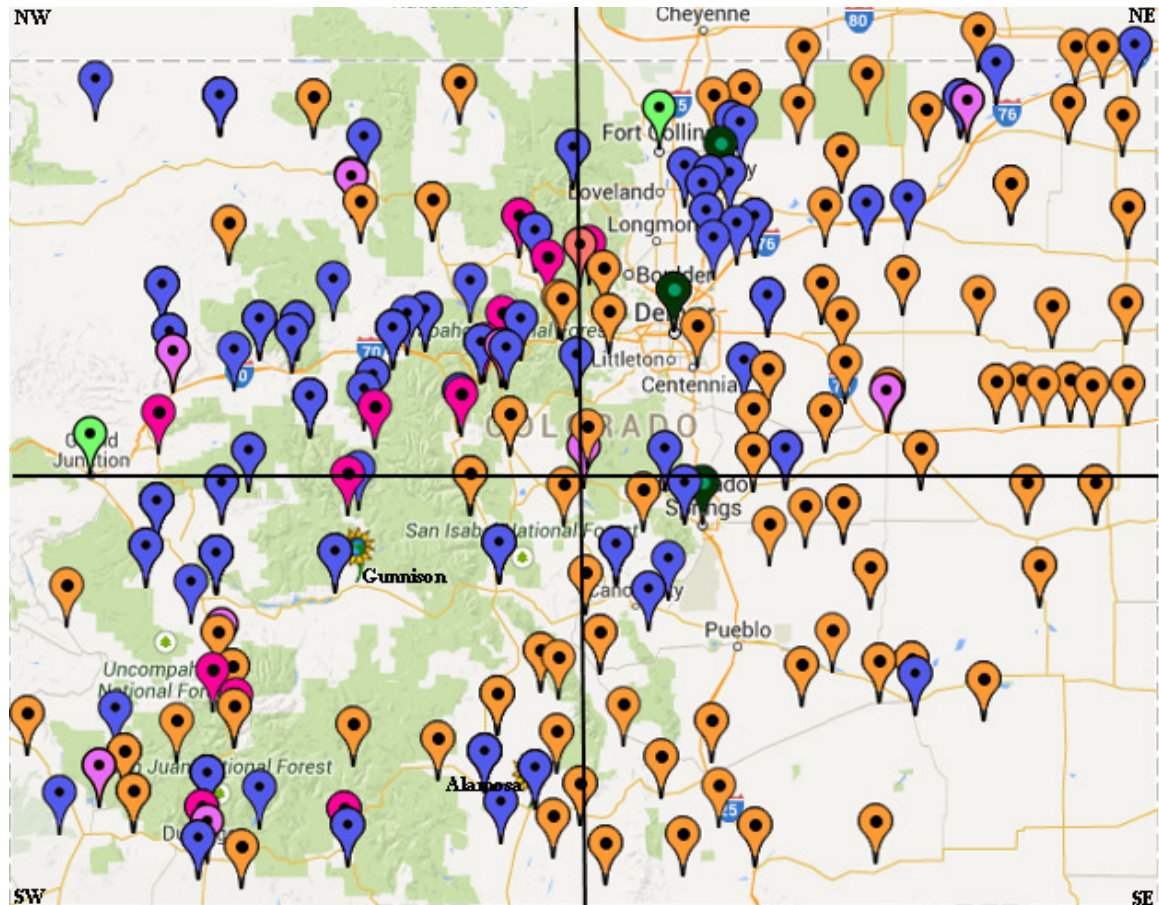**Map Key for Figure 5.1. Rural and Small Rural School Distribution**

Figure 5.1. Rural and small rural school distribution in Colorado. Of the 388 rural schools within the 148 rural Colorado school districts, 196 schools are classified as small rural and 192 are classified as small rural. Also shown is the distribution of colleges and universities that have administrator and principal preparation programs and are located in an area classified as rural or small rural as well as the distribution of ski resorts and the location of meetings held by Colorado's Rural Education Council.

Map Key
Orange pins: small rural schools.
Blue pins: rural schools.
Bright pink pins: ski resorts.
Lavendar pins: REC meeting locations.
Forest green pins: universities with both administrative and principal preparation programs
Light green pins: universities with only principal preparation programs.
Sunflower pins: universities with only principal preparation programs located in a rural area.